

HORMONE REPLACEMENT: ESTROGEN & PROGESTERONE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are hormones and why do I need them?

Hormones are an essential part of the metabolic process of living. Hormones are important for the cells, organs, and metabolism. Our hormones decline through aging, menopause, disease or trauma. When this happens, we begin an accelerated aging process. Loss of hormones is one of the major reasons for our deterioration as we get older, both physically and mentally. Hormones are beneficial at any age, but the best long term protective benefits are achieved if hormones are replaced when you begin to lose them, usually in our 40's.

What are the typical hormones that are prescribed?

Synthetic estrogen (i.e. Premarin) and progestin (i.e. Provera) are produced in a laboratory. They are chemically altered so that they can be patented by the pharmaceutical companies. They are not identical to human hormones. They are designed to try to elicit the same responses in your body as your natural hormones. Because synthetic hormones are not identical to human hormones, they might adversely stimulate the cells and lead to side effects or cancer. Premarin is an estrogen obtained from pregnant horses and is not human identical. Provera is a progestin. Both have been implicated in causing problems in some women, including breast cancer.

How are bio-identical estrogen and progesterone produced?

Hormones that are identical to human hormones are found in yams and soy. We call these "natural" because they are natural to the body. The hormones are extracted from these vegetables and then processed by a specialty compounding pharmacy into a prescription dose and form. The body accepts and metabolizes these hormones as if it made them.

What are the problems with synthetic hormones?

When first developed, synthetic hormones were well received because they provided some of the benefits of hormone replacement: controlling the symptoms of menopause and fighting osteoporosis and heart disease. However, the long-term results have shown that synthetic hormones sometimes elicit a negative metabolic response. Some women can't tolerate synthetic hormones - often suffering with side effects such as bloating, bleeding or mood swings. In some patients, synthetic estrogens and progestins contributed to the development of breast and uterine cancer.

Synthetic hormones are not a perfect match in the body. Synthetic hormones produce abnormal metabolites that can cause side effects and increase the risk of cancer. A natural hormone is a perfect fit in the body - it is a biologically identical hormone replacement.

Why doesn't my gynecologist prescribe bio-identical hormones?

Natural supplements such as vitamins and hormones are protected by federal regulation and may not be patented. Major pharmaceutical manufacturers are interested only in patentable drugs that are exclusive and profitable. A lot of what physicians learn is from the drug companies who are promoting their products. Therefore, your doctors are primarily taught only about synthetic products. Bio-identical hormones do not come under specific brand names. Your physician must be self-educated and experienced in prescribing and monitoring natural hormones. They probably just don't know a lot about them or must prescribe within the constraints of your health insurance.

What is the truth about the recent publicity about the risks of taking hormones?

The Women's Health Initiative (WHI) is a study that focused on synthetic estrogen (Premarin) and progestin (Provera). NOTE: Progestin is not progesterone. There were different "arms" of the study using different drug combinations. The arm of the study using Premarin and Provera (PremPro) was discontinued before completion because an increased risk of breast cancer was detected in the early stages of the study. This risk is attributed to the Provera portion of the regimen. This is not the first time progestins have been implicated in increasing risks for women. The arm of the study using Premarin did not show an increased risk of breast cancer, but was discontinued because of increased incidence of strokes in older women. A recent study showed that natural estrogen did not have the same effects.

Unfortunately, the media has misrepresented the facts of this study by targeting all hormone therapy. **THIS IS WRONG!** Again, the culprits are synthetic progestin, Provera, and horse estrogen (equilin) not natural estrogen or natural progesterone. There are numerous studies showing the long term benefits of hormone therapy. You just need to make sure you are receiving the right hormones (bio-identical) in the right balance. It is also important to begin hormone replacement as soon as you begin to lose the hormones to avoid any length of time without their protective benefits.