



Striking a Balance

Teya Skae examines the balancing role of progesterone in counteracting oestrogen dominance, increasingly a side effect of stress.



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We hardly need reminding that it's a stressful world we live in these days. In fact, not only does stress cause a myriad of symptoms including adrenal fatigue, insomnia and weight gain, but a recent study suggests work related stress can kill. (1) We certainly know that prolonged stress creates some very powerful conditions.

One of the most common symptoms of stress that's occurring in our society now is oestrogen dominance, a term used by the late Dr John Lee in his first book on natural progesterone. The book describes oestrogen dominance as a condition where a woman of any age, can have deficient, normal, or excessive oestrogen, but has little or no progesterone to balance its effects in the body. This can lead to very serious multiple symptoms that get overlooked as stemming from oestrogen dominance.

And it's not only women who can have oestrogen dominance. Men are now equally at risk. Oestrogen gradually rises as men age, while saliva levels of progesterone and testosterone gradually fall. Thus, with ageing, oestrogen dominance occurs. A clear sign of oestrogen dominance in ageing men is their tendency to develop breasts. This indicates these men are low in both progesterone and testosterone.

In essence, oestrogen dominance is a byproduct of living in our typical 21st century Western society where the overuse of chemicals in foods, cosmetics, and household products, pesticides, added hormones in chickens and antibiotics in meats creates biochemical stress. In addition, cooking and storing foods in plastic containers contributes significantly to oestrogen dominance occurring in our bodies, because these processes mimic oestrogen receptors and disrupt the natural balance of other hormones.

All too often our food chain is laced with toxic pesticides, herbicides and growth hormones—a sea of endocrine disrupting chemicals that mimic the action of oestrogen in our body. If we are overweight, our body's store of excess fat can be converted into oestrogen. Insulin resistance leads to oestrogen dominance. A visit to our GP for the odd hot flash, missed period or PMS discomfort can result in a prescription of oestrogen pills, patches or implants.

Oestrogen dominance is something few people know enough about. Added to this, most women have been convinced (by pharmaceutical companies) that this substance is the answer to most female hormonal problems, whether in the form of the contraceptive pill for menstruating women or HRT for menopausal women.

Let's understand oestrogen

It is a steroidal hormone produced in both males and females that stimulates the development of secondary sexual characteristics and induces menstruation in women. Oestrogen is important for the maintenance of normal brain function and the development of nerve cells.

Oestrogen is the hormone that stimulates cell proliferation, or the growing phase. In other words, it causes cells to divide and multiply. Progesterone, on the other hand, is the hormone that stops growth and induces cell maturation and programmed cell death (called apoptosis), which may be very helpful in supporting cancer treatment.

If the balance between oestrogen and progesterone gets disrupted in any way, oestrogen dominance then results, creating a number of common symptoms that often get overlooked as hormonal imbalance.

If oestrogen is not balanced with progesterone, a very common imbalance in today's society, many hormone related health issues may arise, such as PMS, endometriosis, uterine fibroids, infertility, weight gain, increased blood clotting, thyroid dysfunction, even cancer in both men and women.

The safest way to balance oestrogen dominance is with its counter hormone, progesterone, just as Dr Lee described in his book *Natural Progesterone: The Multiple Roles of a Remarkable Hormone*. Simply by withdrawing oestrogen and replacing it with more progesterone, hormonal balance takes place much more naturally over weeks and months, especially if hormone-laden meats and chicken are withdrawn from the typical Western daily diet.

Typical symptoms and effects of oestrogen dominance

These include;

- Water retention and bloating
- Weight gain
- Loss of energy
- Decreased libido
- Increased risk of stroke and heart disease
- Thinning skin
- Incidental in the start of osteoporosis
- Can induce hypertension and high blood pressure
- Headaches
- Irregular menstrual cycles
- Increased risk of fibroids
- Increased risk of breast cancer
- May initiate fibrocystic breast disease
- Increased risk of uterine cancer

Role of progesterone

Progesterone is a steroid hormone made by both men and women. In women, it is made in the corpus luteum of the ovary and in smaller amounts by the adrenal glands. In men, it is produced in adrenal and testicular tissue. Progesterone receptors are present in men, women and children of all ages, making it a fundamental hormone.

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Progesterone is made in our body from cholesterol and is the essential raw material from which our body makes many of the other steroid hormones, including cortisol and testosterone.

Progesterone is converted by the adrenal glands into other hormones such as cortisone, oestrogen, testosterone and others. It is involved in reproduction, but as it's not exclusively a sex hormone it does not impart any secondary sexual characteristics.

Why do men need progesterone?

Progesterone in men is vital to good health. It is the primary precursor of their adrenal cortical hormones and testosterone. Men synthesise progesterone in smaller amounts than women, but they still need it for basic balance.

For example, adding progesterone back into the male body helps restore normal inhibition of 5-alpha-reductase, which prevents testosterone from changing into dihydrotestosterone (DHT), which stimulates proliferation of prostate cells, leading to prostate cancer.

Boosting progesterone levels

Natural progesterone or bio-identical progesterone is routinely used in fertility clinics around the globe to help sustain pregnancy in high risk situations. Please note bio-identical progesterone is not the Wild Yam creams that are touted as progesterone replacement.

In 1943, Russell Marker made progesterone cream from the plant steroid, diosgenin. He used the Mexican wild yam (*dioscorea villosa*) as a source plant. However, diosgenin has now been found in many other plants, including

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the spice fenugreek and the soya bean. It is essential for life for all vertebrates, fish, reptiles, birds and mammals, including humans. It has countless functions in both males and females of all ages—regulating blood sugar, developing intelligence, building bones, brain activity and much more. Our bodies make it all the time.

When oestrogen becomes the dominant hormone, it can potentially become toxic to the body, increasing the need for balancing progesterone. In this way, progesterone has a balancing or mitigating effect on oestrogen.

Johns Hopkins University conducted a 20 year study, published in 1985 in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, showing that women who had good progesterone levels had less than a fifth of the incidence of breast cancer, and less than a tenth of all cancers that occurred in women who were low in progesterone. These outcomes suggest that having a normal level of progesterone protected women from nine tenths of all cancers that might otherwise have occurred.

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There is much confusion in the minds of both the public and the professions between progesterone on the one hand, and the progestins or progestogens and "yam extracts" on the other.

Progesterone is a natural hormone made by the body and which is now being made from the plant extract, diosgenin. Progesterone, on the other hand, is a synthetic hormone (with a molecular structure that differs from that of progesterone) used by the drug companies in oral contraceptives and HRT in preference (for commercial reasons) to the natural hormone. The contra-indications, precautions, and adverse reactions of these synthetics make horrifying reading.

Many people confuse natural bio-identical progesterone with "yam extracts" and "yam creams", which do not contain progesterone. The yam creams can have a beneficial adaptogenic effect on the body but, unlike progesterone, they cannot correct hormonal

imbalances such as excessive levels of oestrogen or oestrogen dominance.

A study published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* (June 1999, pages 1504-1511), states that "In order to obtain the proper (effective) serum levels with use of a progesterone cream, the cream needs to have an adequate amount of progesterone in it [at least 30 milligrams per gram]. Many over the counter creams in the US have little [for example, 5 milligrams per ounce] or none at all. In addition, the creams that are made from Mexican yams are not metabolised to progesterone by women."

If natural progesterone has so many benefits, why don't physicians routinely recommend it to their patients? You may have already guessed the answer to this question. Progesterone is a natural substance and, as such, cannot be patented for sale at high profit margins. That makes pharmaceutical companies uninterested in marketing and promoting it. And if pharmaceutical representatives don't market a product to physicians, many physicians are simply unaware of its existence or benefits.

Even though most doctors are not trained in the benefits of progesterone therapy and the concept of progesterone balance, there are enough enlightened medical doctors in the USA, Britain and elsewhere who have been using progesterone to treat their patients for a number of years now and have the stats to prove its effectiveness.

Progesterone cream is currently being used by thousands of women in the Western world to ensure they maintain progesterone balance. The speed with which the cream

relieves symptoms varies depending upon both the health problem itself and the quality of the cream being used. Some women find relief within five days, in others it can take three months or even longer, while the reversal of osteoporosis can take six months.

In summary, oestrogen dominance is becoming much more prevalent in Australia and other Western countries because of the use of chemicals, pesticides added to our foods and hormones given to our livestock, and the use of plastics. In addition, our fast paced life is taxing our adrenal glands so much that they are challenged with the demands of coping with stress and are not capable of metabolising and regulating progesterone, which is one of their key functions.

While progesterone therapy is better known and widely used in treating the multiple symptoms of oestrogen dominance in the US and Britain, here in Australia natural progesterone is more difficult to obtain. In a promising sign, though, its use is increasing as better educated health care practitioners and doctors become aware of the need for progesterone balance and are now using it in helping to balance hormones naturally, without using patented pharmaceutical alternatives which are not what nature intended.

In Wellness, Teya Skae.

1. <http://au.news.yahoo.com/080123/15/15lx7.html>

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