

Hormone havoc: Navigating the symptoms of hormone imbalance

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Have you suddenly gained a lot of weight? Does your life feel like an emotional roller coaster? Your hormones might be to blame. Hormonal imbalance can have a tremendous effect on your health.



Hormones are your body's chemical messengers that help regulate many bodily processes and influence fat storage, energy levels, sex drive, brain health and a host of other vital functions. They are produced in the endocrine glands and travel through the bloodstream to tell the body's muscles, organs, and tissues what to do and when to do it. Hormones tell your body whether you are sleepy, stressed, or hungry. It also tells you when you need to calm down, when you need to sleep and when to stop eating.

There are many hormones that regulate our bodily functions such as oestrogen, progesterone, testosterone, leptin, cortisol, melatonin, etc. Sex hormones control many processes in the body such as menopause, hair growth, pregnancy, puberty, hair complexion, and skin complexion.

Hormonal imbalances occur when there is too little or too much of a hormone in the bloodstream. This can be caused by a variety of factors such as stress, poor diet, lack of exercise, certain medications, and medical conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and thyroid disorders.

Additionally, hormonal changes that occur naturally during puberty, pregnancy, and menopause can also cause imbalances. Because hormones play such a vital role in the body, even minute hormonal imbalances can lead to a range of symptoms that can affect a person's physical and emotional well-being. Your body will tell you when your hormones are out of balance. You may experience any combination of symptoms depending on what's being produced and what isn't.

Potential signs of hormonal imbalance include but is not limited to:

- **Sudden weight change**

Hormonal imbalances can cause weight gain, particularly around the midsection. This is because imbalances in insulin, cortisol, and thyroid hormones can affect metabolism and lead to increased fat storage. If you are experiencing unintended weight gain or loss it could be due to thyroid hormone issues.

- **Irregular periods**

Hormonal imbalances can cause changes in oestrogen and progesterone levels, which can affect the menstrual cycle. This can include heavy bleeding, missed periods, or periods that are too frequent.

- **Insomnia and lack of quality sleep**

Hormonal imbalances can also affect sleep patterns, leading to insomnia or difficulty falling asleep. Oestrogen and progesterone affects a woman's ability to sleep, and especially during menopause, this can cause insomnia. Low levels of oestrogen can trigger hot flashes and night sweats, both of which can make it tough to get some quality sleep. Hormones such as cortisol and melatonin also play a role in regulating sleep-wake cycles.

- **Increased thirst**

Oestrogen and progesterone influence your body's hydration levels, and when their levels change – like they do before or at the start of your period – you may need to increase your fluid intake to stay hydrated. Excessive sweating from hot flushes and night sweats further reduce sodium levels and compound the problem. Heavy menstrual flow like some women in peri-menopause experience can create dehydration. Thirst can also be a sign that your body isn't making enough anti-diuretic hormone (ADH), which helps you retain a healthy amount of water.

- **Chronic acne**

Hormonal imbalances can also affect the skin, leading to acne breakouts. This is because changes in testosterone levels can increase sebum production, leading to clogged pores and acne.

- **Brain fog**

A multitude of hormones, including cortisol, oestrogen, dopamine, oxytocin, and thyroid hormones, interact with the neurotransmitters in your brain. If these hormones get out of their delicate balance, you can start to experience memory loss and might have difficulty concentrating. Restoring this delicate balance can also help to restore your sharpness of mind.

- **Persistent fatigue**

Feeling tired all the time despite getting adequate rest, it might be because of your hormones. This is because hormones such as cortisol and thyroid hormones play a role in regulating energy levels and metabolism. Thyroid hormone deficiencies and other imbalances can cause persistent fatigue that won't seem to go away no matter how much you rest.

- **Headaches**

Oestrogen and progesterone play key roles in the menstrual cycle and pregnancy and may affect headache-related chemicals in the brain. A headache can be triggered any time there is a fluctuation in oestrogen levels, including menstruation, pregnancy, lactation and when taking oral contraceptives. Women may also experience more headaches around the start of menopause and when they undergo a hysterectomy.

- **Hair loss**

Changes in oestrogen, progesterone, and testosterone levels, and other hormonal imbalances (such as your thyroid or insulin hormones) can affect hair growth cycles, leading to thinning hair or hair loss.

- **Loss of libido**

One of the major symptoms of hormonal imbalance is low libido. This starts with disturbed sleep because with a lack of quality sleep, our sex hormone production can diminish. For men and women, declining levels of testosterone and oestrogen cause a lower sex drive.

Other symptoms of hormone imbalance include anxiety, mood swings, and depression, digestive problems (gas, bloating), hunger cravings and night sweats. Not getting your hormones back in balance could lead to other problems, like elevated cholesterol, osteoporosis, obesity, and more.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it is important to consult with your general medical practitioner for proper diagnosis and treatment of hormone imbalances.

They can perform hormone level tests and recommend treatments such as hormone replacement therapy or lifestyle changes to help manage your symptoms and improve quality of life.

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