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Wellness

Balancing Hormones

A Natural Method



by Mary Jo
Blackwood, RN,
MPH

When our hormones are out of kilter, our world can fall apart. Hormones are that important. "I see so many women who come into my office with horrible symptoms," says Dr. Kathy Maupin. "They have been from doctor to doctor and were told they were basically crazy, that they were just getting old and it 'comes with the territory,' so get used to it."

Maupin, an Ob/Gyn, has made hormone rebalancing her passion. Besides her regular practice, Balanced Care for Women, she runs BioBalance4Women, which tackles hormone balancing strictly with bio-identical hormone replacement.

While much of the hormone therapy on the market is made from animal sources, bio-identical hormones are made from wild yam or soy and then compounded in an FDA-controlled pharmacy laboratory to exactly match the hormone molecules natural to the human body. Patients on pellet therapy are injected with personalized hormone combinations that replace what they are lacking in their system, based on lab results.

"People need the injections every four to six months, depending on how fast they use them up," says Maupin. They are injected into fat, so the leaner and more active the woman, the more often she needs replenishing. Maupin says an added benefit of the hormone tests is discovering other endocrine imbalances, like thyroid or pituitary problems, which can also be adjusted.

Many women are surprised that they need testosterone, which naturally declines after menopause, Maupin says. Symptoms of low testosterone in women include in-

creased abdominal fat, insomnia and decreased sex drive. "Testosterone crosses the blood-brain barrier and affects even how you look at your partner," she adds. "I teach patients to listen to their bodies. The first symptom that goes away with treatment is usually the first one to come back when pellets get low."

Maupin says bio-identical hormone therapy is designed to recreate a pre-menopausal state: a younger female shape, normal libido, young skin, thick bones, higher energy level, a non-depressive disposition and normal memory. More information is available at www.biobalance4women.com.

Jennifer Rich, owner and pharmacist of Jennifer's Pharmacy in Clayton, reports a growing request for compounding and supplements, herbs and homeopathic preparations. Most of her compounding is also done with bio-identical hormones.

"We make micronized progesterone, three different estrogens, testosterone, dhea, pregnenolone, thyroid and melatonin," Rich says. "Dhea is needed to make other hormones and has anti-aging qualities, as does pregnenolone. All those preparations are by prescription only and created in combinations that match the patient's specific needs."

Compounding allows the drug design to be completely personalized in component and dosage, without additives. The right dose should take care of the symptoms without side effects, Rich says. Standard drugs on the market come in limited dosages and aren't the same molecules as the patient's own hormones, she adds.

A recent issue of Newsweek on health in the 21st century reported that someday medications would be custom-made for individual patients. "That day is now," says Paul Hueseman, an owner of Bellevue Pharmacy Solutions. "We consult with patients about their symptoms, work with their physicians,

look at lab results and make recommendations on the hormones that need replacement. Because we're not working with manufactured drugs, where one dose fits all, we can adjust the dose incrementally until we hit exactly the right one."

Hueseman says that sublingual (under the tongue) hormones, gels, patches and creams, as well as injected pellets, all have the advantage of bypassing the liver. "Clinical data shows that hormones should not be given orally because of side effects," he says. "The liver turns them into different forms that might be less effective or even harmful. A study in France in 2003 showed that oral estrogen increased C-reactive protein levels associated with plaque buildup in the arteries, which could lead to coronary artery disease and blood clots."

One misconception the public has, Hueseman says, is that they should take the lowest dose of hormones possible for the shortest time to get rid of symptoms. Doing that just delays the symptoms. "The purpose of bio-identical hormones is to prevent dips in hormone levels and keep them constant with the exact hormone the body needs," he explains. "It is a lifelong therapy to maintain your body and prevent disease."

For patients at high risk or who have had breast cancer, bio-identical hormone therapy is still an option. "Depending on the nature of the cancer, we can change the percentage of protective estrogens, eliminate some, and add progesterone or testosterone, which has shown to be very protective against breast cancer," Hueseman says.

BP Solutions works with men too. "They go through andropause and become at high risk for coronary artery disease, depression, loss of muscle mass and decreased sex drive." **LN**