

Title : BIOIDENTICAL HORMONE REPLACEMENT Q & A . Authorn Dr. Ferdinand Cabrera

Fatigue, Mood Swings, Irritability, Depression, Insomnia, Panic Attacks, Loss of Sexual Interest, Unwanted Facial Hair, Painful Intercourse, Strange Dreams, Hot Flashes, Night Sweats, Vaginal Itching, Osteoporosis, Painful Joints, Hair Loss, Breast Tenderness, Palpitations, Migraine Headaches, Memory Lapses, Irregular/Heavy Periods and Difficulty Losing Weight.

These are just some of the most frequent symptoms of hormone imbalance. Unfortunately for many, the treatments that are most commonly used are aimed to mask or treat the symptoms rather than the underlying imbalance that produced them in the first place.

Q: What causes hormone imbalances?

A: Hormone imbalances can start as early as our teenage years but are more common around our mid-thirties, which can then progress into menopause and andropause (male menopause). Both males and females have a hormonal web that feeds into other body systems. In other words, we are not simply body parts; we are connected, holistic beings.

Within our brains the hypothalamus sends messages to the pituitary gland, which then transmits them to the thyroid, parathyroid, ovaries, testicles and adrenal glands. Each gland needs to work properly in order for our hormonal messages to be accurate. In addition, enzyme systems convert hormones from one steroid to another using precursor hormones such as cholesterol and pregnenolone. The hormonal web or "steroid family" includes the estrogens (estradiol, estriol, estrone), progesterone, androgens (testosterone, DHEA, androstenedione), glucocorticoids (cortisol, cortisone) and mineralocorticoids (aldosterone).

Environmental influences, emotional health factors, dietary habits, nutrition status, exercise habits, nicotine use, alcohol consumption and our own liver detoxification abilities are all important factors that can positively or negatively impact our hormone balance.

Q: What is bioidentical hormone therapy?

A: Bioidentical means "human-identical" or equal to the organic structure and function of the one we were born with (endogenous). When we pursue bioidentical hormone corrective therapies, the goal is to restore our hormones to physiologic levels and help the body regain its metabolic "fitness," which in turn allows the individual to move successfully toward wellness. The outcome is people who feel better, gain energy, stabilize emotions, sleep better, experience fewer headaches, resolve symptoms of dysfunctional uterine bleeding and fibrocystic breasts, improve body composition, gain sex drive and lose weight, among other benefits.

Bioidentical hormones are derived from a plant oil called diosgenin (extracted from soybeans and wild yams), that is very similar in chemical structure to our precursor steroid hormone, cholesterol. Diosgenin is then altered in a lab to exactly match our human bioidentical steroids. Any component that may cause an allergic reaction to these plants is also removed during this conversion process.

Progestins, which are found in oral contraceptives and the product known as Provera®, are synthetic hormones (not bioidentical) while progesterone is bioidentical (it matches our own hormone makeup). Unfortunately, these terms have been used interchangeably in medical, nursing and pharmaceutical literature and doctors have often assumed them to be one in the same, although their effects in the human body are different and they have different chemical structures. Another example is the difference between Premarin®, which contains horse estrogens (equilin and equilenin), and additives that are synthetic versus estradiol and estriol, which are bioidentical.

Q: How are hormone imbalances diagnosed and assessed?

A: It is of extreme importance to look at the “harmony” or balance of not one but all hormones. There are different tools available to assess any possible hormone balances in an individual including physical findings, blood tests, saliva and urinary tests. Saliva testing measures the free, unbound, biologically active hormones as they travel by passive diffusion from the capillaries into the saliva. In my practice I use a combination of functional medicine (holistically analyzing and treating interdependent systems of the body in order to discover the proper balance necessary for good health) and metabolic testing based on each individual’s needs in order to properly assess hormone imbalances.

Q: How is hormone therapy administered to patients?

A: When we use bioidentical corrective hormone therapy, the dosing and method of delivery can be tailored to the individual. Compounded formulations can also be done for oral (slow or immediate release), buccal, sublingual drops, troches, transdermal or transvaginal (suppositories or cream) routes of delivery. Compounding pharmacists are specifically trained and assisted by the Professional Compounding Centers of America to comply with specific, well-researched guidelines to produce pure, standardized formulations. They also work closely with physicians to help the unique needs of their clients. An example of such a pharmacy is Univeral Arts Compounding Pharmacy. There are a handful of bioidentical hormones available from commercial preparations, but some have limitations in terms of achieving hormone balance.

In addition, the product known as Prometrium® (micronized progesterone) contains peanut oil, which should be avoided in cases of known allergies to peanuts. I recommend using bioidentical estrogens by transdermal route since it bypasses the

liver and allows for the use of smaller doses. Unfortunately, estrogen taken orally can cause such side effects as increased blood pressure, increased triglycerides, increased estrone, gallstones, elevated liver enzymes, decreased growth hormone (the hormone that keeps you youthful), interrupted serotonin metabolism (serotonin keeps you calm and happy), increased SHBG (decreased testosterone), increased carbohydrate cravings and weight gain.

Q: What are the possible side effects of this therapy?

A: In general patients experience very few side effects while taking bioidentical hormones that are prescribed in physiologic doses. For example, oral progesterone can cause drowsiness in about two to five percent of women who use it, an outcome of how it is metabolized by their hepatic system. Bioidentical hormones prescribed in non-physiologic doses can cause symptoms related to excessive supply, such as increased breast tenderness with too much estrogen. Again, the goal is to use the smallest dose that will produce correction to physiologic levels and balance all hormones. Special attention is required for the adrenal glands (which produce "stress" hormones: cortisol and DHEA), since imbalances of this gland will precipitate and/or exacerbate thyroid imbalances as well as menopausal symptoms.

Q: What are the benefits of using bioidentical hormone therapy?

A: The advantages of bioidentical hormones are that they are individualized, generally well-tolerated and produce exceptional symptom reversal in most cases. The only possible challenge of compounded bioidentical hormones is that practitioners must commit themselves to a new level of learning and creative problem solving as they step beyond the basics taught in medical or nursing education to monitor steroid serum or saliva levels and prescribe bioidentical hormone corrective therapies.

I encourage my patients to examine every aspect of their health and try to provide them with the tools for achieving their goals, even those beyond hormone balancing, including: education, stress management techniques, craniosacral therapy (manual therapy to treat distortions in the bones of the skull), massage, facial and general acupuncture, anti-aging skin care management, smoking cessation, nutritional evaluations and counseling, body composition analysis, targeted nutritional support, individualized fitness consultations and a premier metabolic fitness and weight loss program.

With bioidentical hormone therapy, the ailments that have afflicted you can be relieved naturally and painlessly so you can feel better than ever before. Make a decision to heal yourself by obtaining modern day health and wellness through this breakthrough modality and our other available treatments and programs that will also help you to achieve the high quality of life you desire.
