

Hormone Imbalance and Infertility

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More and more doctors are learning about nutritional and environmental medicine. If you speak to one about your hormone imbalance and infertility they'll often tell you that addressing underlying factors rather than using hormone replacement therapy (synthetic or bio-identical) is often a better way to achieve the perfect hormone balance for fertility with fewer side effects, sustained symptom relief and overall improved health.

Combat Hormone Imbalance and Infertility

Naturopaths are happy to see our colleagues starting to appreciate the benefits of the therapies we've been using for decades – dietary and lifestyle modifications, supplementation and herbal medicine where applicable, while addressing the whole person and not just one system or organ in order to fight hormone imbalance and infertility.

For many women and men, hormonal imbalances are a real hazard to their health and fertility. To name just a few; diabetes, hypo/hyper thyroidism, PCOS, luteal phase defect, endometriosis and benign prostatic hypertrophy can be successfully managed with natural medicine. For many women low progesterone or excessive estrogen pose a real barrier to a healthy pregnancy, while for men testosterone imbalance can disrupt healthy sperm generation.

Let's look how hormones are made at the cellular level, to help understand how diet and lifestyle tie into hormone imbalance and infertility.

For production of steroidal hormones the body needs:

- Cholesterol
- Protein
- Zinc
- Magnesium
- Iodine
- Vitamin C
- B group vitamins (esp. B6 and B3)
- Iron
- Selenium

That's a long list of some pretty important nutrients. Most people are zinc and selenium deficient. Zinc requires an acidic environment for optimal absorption and competes with many nutrients. Selenium is simply not present in the abundant amounts it used to be due to soil depletion. Selenium is a crucial antioxidant important for cancer prevention.

Constant stress, frequent colds and flu, alcohol, smoking and coffee will deplete vitamin C, magnesium and vitamin B stores. Iodine is abundant in seafood and sea weed and sea salt. However many people don't eat seafood and fish much anymore, and most tend to use salt sparingly.

As you can see it's very easy to develop a hormone imbalance just from a nutrient deficiency resulting from poor diet, unhealthy lifestyle choices, inability to digest and absorb nutrients (due to gut inflammation from food intolerances and allergies).

Here we didn't even look at further factors such as toxins from the environment, commercial cleaning solutions and personal care products, radiation from frequent flying, laptops, TV, mobile phones etc...

Sex hormone binding globulins (SHBG) are required for production of estrogen and testosterone. Studies have found that SHBG levels are influenced by insulin resistance (diabetes) and thyroid hormone imbalance (hypothyroidism).

Gut and Liver Function and Excess Estrogen

Our liver not only makes hormones but also breaks them down and is in charge of getting them into a state in which they can be excreted from the body. However if we don't have enough friendly bacteria in our gut (probiotics: acidophilus, bifidus, bulgaricus etc...) then the not so friendly bacteria will take over – this is called Dysbiosis.

Flatulence, diarrhea and constipation are just some of the symptoms of Dysbiosis, or overgrowth of bad gut bacteria. These bacteria produce an enzyme which converts the estrogen prepared by the liver for excretion, back into a form which can't be excreted, so they end up circulating in the body creating an estrogen excess.

The liver uses two steps to detoxify and clear toxins and excess hormones from the body. They are: Phase I and Phase II. Not to bore you with technical terminology, I'll explain the function of each phase in very simple terms. Phase I converts toxins and hormones into very toxic substances and Phase II makes these substances water soluble so that they can be excreted with urine.

Many drugs interfere with either of the two phases of detoxification. Vegetables which have been shown to promote estrogen clearance and phase I liver detoxification, are cruciferous vegetables such as; broccoli, Brussel sprouts and cabbage. For Phase two among other things, the liver needs lots of folic acid and B12.

Xenoestrogens

Pesticides and some plastics in our body will mimic estrogen and dock on the same receptor sites, reserved for the real oestrogen, affecting hormone imbalance and infertility. This is another way in which excess estrogen accumulates in the body resulting in fibrocystic breast disease, PMS, benign prostatic hypertrophy, menstrual migraines and endometriosis.

Stress

Hormone imbalance and infertility can be influenced by something as simple as stress. Excessive stress combined with ovarian decline results in poor luteal phase function and progesterone deficiency. High doses of vitamins B, C and magnesium are useful for adrenal function to help your body cope with stress better.

Diet

Diets high in saturated fats and low in beneficial omega 3 and 6 result in excessive production of pro-inflammatory hormones and not enough anti-inflammatory hormones. This can result in period cramps and predisposes the body to inflammatory conditions.

In conclusion: as you can see, hormone imbalance and infertility are influenced by your diet and lifestyle which are of utmost importance. And it's impossible to isolate just one system when treating hormonal imbalances as so many organs from different body systems are involved in 'hormone management'.

What you put in your mouth will be broken down into individual units and used by the body for creation of hormones and cells. If what you eat is unhealthy, processed, full of chemicals, artificial sweeteners, saturated fat, pesticides and herbicides you shouldn't be surprised if you have sub optimal health and hormonal imbalances. Harsh but true.

You are what you eat, so make wise choices, your health is in your hands. Make healthy choices based on common sense and do your own research on hormone imbalance and infertility. My recommendation to all my clients – eat as fresh as possible, organic where possible, in small amounts every three hours.

The above steps are an introduction towards avoiding hormone imbalance and infertility.