Women Helping Women: Restoring Female Hormone Balance

By Sharon Price, MS (Nutrition)

Dr. Beverly Goode-Kanawati, DO, Director of Beverly Medical Center, has a special interest in the complications of hormone issues that began with her own health story:

For many years I suffered with severe migraine headaches, fatigue, high cholesterol, obesity, thyroid, “female troubles,” and joint pain. I felt really bad, all of the time. Learning about why I was so unhealthy led me to an understanding of what to do to regain my health.

It changed my whole way of thinking about medicine and health.

This understanding led Dr. Goode-Kanawati to explore the role hormones play in our health and—most importantly—to focus her practice on addressing hormone and other imbalances. With her team of female practitioners at Beverly Medical Center, she treats hormone imbalances and other chronic health issues using an integrative approach, blending the latest diagnostic techniques with preventive treatment plans that include nutrition, lifestyle, and wellness strategies.

HORMONE IMBALANCE: THE ROOT OF MANY HEALTH PROBLEMS

Hormones may be tiny, but they can pose a big challenge to quality of life. Menstrual disturbances, endometriosis, infertility, and increased risk for fibrocystic breast and other disease can all result from seemingly small imbalances. Most of us are familiar with pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), with up to 75 percent of women experiencing some symptoms. The natural drop in progesterone at this time of month can lead to water retention and weight gain, or lower libido.

Hormonal imbalances can also be responsible for migraines, chronic pain, fatigue, anxiety, depression, or “brain fog.”

And if your hormones get out of sync at different times or throughout your cycle, the impact can be significant. Producing less progesterone leaves you with less protection against uterine fibroid disease, less efficient fat burning, or can contribute to the fertility challenges affecting up to 40 percent of women today. When your estrogen levels drop in peri-menopause and menopause, your risk for both osteoporosis and heart disease increases substantially.

ENDOCRINE DISRUPTORS: MAKING A CHALLENGING PROBLEM WORSE

Hormone imbalances not only have a significant impact on our health, they are increasingly common. This is because we are increasingly exposed to endocrine disruptors—substances that interfere with natural hormone balance. These include chemicals and pesticides, pollution, homebuilding materials, personal care products, and even hormonal birth control—all can disrupt natural hormone function. You may already be aware of substances like bisphenol A, PCBs, and phthalates (plastics) and take steps to avoid them. But since these substances settle into the soil, water supply, and fatty tissues of animals we consume, it’s impossible to avoid endocrine disruptors completely.

One reason these substances cause problems is that endocrine disruptors mimic the hormones themselves but block actual hormone production and function. Even low levels can exert widespread effects, because—despite the importance of hormones to most bodily functions—we produce only small amounts of them.

ESTROGEN DOMINANCE, ENDOMETRIOSIS, PCOS

Another increasingly common hormonal imbalance is estrogen dominance, contributing to mood swings, stronger PMS symptoms, weight gain in hips and thighs, sweet cravings, and more. This situation is complicated by the existence of both “good” and “bad” estrogens. While “good” estrogens are protective against DNA damage and cancer, so-called “bad” estrogens increase risks for breast cancer, with effects exacerbated by other negative influences such as heavy metal exposure, chemicals, and oxidized fats from an unhealthy diet.

Environmental toxins play a role in hormone imbalance as well. For example, estrogen dominance is not driven simply by excess estrogen production and “bad” vs. “good” estrogens, but also by too many oxidizing agents, lack of antioxidants, and poor liver detoxification from the cumulative impact of toxic exposures.

Estrogen levels also play a role in the painful condition of endometriosis, which affects more than five million women in the US and Canada alone, and is one of the top three drivers of infertility. Although there is no clear single cause for the condition, hormonal imbalances and endocrine disruptors are believed to play a role.

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) is another condition of hormonal imbalance, marked by increased androgen levels causing symptoms such as acne, excess face and body hair, and fertility issues. PCOS sufferers experience higher obesity rates and are at higher risk for metabolic syndrome, a combination of issues driving increased risk for heart disease, stroke, or other major health issues. The consequences of hormonal imbalances clearly extend far beyond the realm of female reproductive health.

ARE WE DOOMED?

Does this mean we’re doomed to these types of issues, given that we live in an increasingly toxic world? No!

Hormonal imbalances respond very well to lifestyle and nutritional therapies. A healthy detoxifying diet and supportive supplements can help to restore hormonal balance and fertility. Moderate exercise and increased intake of cruciferous vegetables (like broccoli), along with supplemental antioxidants, can increase “good” estrogens and may dramatically lower risk for breast cancer.

In some cases, additional support is needed. Bio-identical hormones—which are identical in appearance to those the body produces—can help restore fertility and ease or eliminate other symptoms of hormonal imbalances.

The key to any successful treatment is that it fit the individual patient’s unique needs. Whatever your stage of life or specific symptoms, the providers at Beverly Medical Center can help create a customized nutritional, lifestyle, and wellness plan. We look at the big picture to determine how best to help you regain and maintain your quality of life. We don’t dismiss your complaints as “female troubles” meant to be endured, but work with you to develop a comprehensive, achievable solution.

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Learn About Hormonal Balance
Wednesday, September 12
6:00 pm
Beverly Medical Center

“Female hormone balance is an issue of great concern to many of our patients,” notes Dr. Goode-Kanawati. “And it is the focus of a free lecture and Q&A session we’re offering at Beverly Medical Center September 12. Join us to learn more about your hormones and restoring hormonal balance; you will meet:

• Dr. Beverly Goode-Kanawati, DO, ABPS, a traditionally trained, Board-Certified Family Practice and Emergency Medicine physician, with a unique approach and over 30 years of proven experience.
• Sandra L. Britt, MS APRN, ANP-C, a nurse practitioner experienced in bio-identical hormone therapies.
• Sharon Price, MS Nutrition, a nutrition expert with extensive experience in actionable, effective, nutrition and lifestyle strategies to optimize well-being.