

Hormones



Hormones are chemical messengers that make up our endocrine system. They exist in minute quantities, but the effects they have are incredibly powerful. The endocrine system is closely linked to all of the body's major systems, such as our cardiovascular, nervous and digestive system. For this reason, imbalances in our endocrine system can have widespread effects. The female reproductive system is particularly complex and therefore more prone to problems. Although specific reproductive conditions may require the

addition of more tailored dietary advice, the following principles are a good basis from which to start. It's important to remember that changes will not occur overnight, usually you need to allow at least three months.

Eat enough fruit and vegetables - Aim for 8-10 servings a day, with the emphasis on vegetables. Fruit and vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients. They are also a great source of fibre, which is vital for making sure excess hormones are excreted out of the body. Make sure you include leafy greens, such as spinach, kale, lambs lettuce and kale. Also, try and include one serving of cruciferous vegetables a day. These include bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collard greens, rocket and watercress. They contain glucosinolates, which are known to help aid hormone balancing and support detoxification.

Use dairy alternatives - Dairy contains hormones naturally present in the cow. Although they are deemed to be at safe levels by food standard agencies, for those people wanting to sort out hormonal imbalances, it is worth removing dairy from the diet altogether so that you are not giving yourself extra hormones for your body to deal with. These days there are plenty of good dairy alternatives, such as oat, almond (unsweetened) and coconut milk and yoghurt.

Include healthy fats and oils in your diet - Essential fatty acids are crucial for a healthy endocrine system. Make sure you include oily fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines, anchovies and herring), and a range of nuts and seeds in your diet.

If possible buy organic foods - Organic foods contain more nutrients and should not contain genetically modified ingredients; they are free of neuro-toxins, support the earth's ecosystem and often taste better too!

Drink plenty of fluids - Water helps with removing waste products and excess hormones and transports vital nutrients in and out of the cells.

Eat phytoestrogen-rich foods - Phytoestrogens are found in foods such as miso, tempeh, tofu, oats, rye bread, kidney beans, lentils, chickpeas, flaxseed oil, flaxseed, sesame and sunflower seeds. They act as natural oestrogen-like substances and can help maintain a healthy balance of oestrogens in the body.

Herbs and spices to support detoxification - Our liver is the main organ for detoxifying hormones, amongst other things. There are a number of herbs and spices that we can add to cooking which particularly help with detoxification. The key ones to focus on are turmeric, rosemary and ginger.



Eat foods that are high in B6, B9 and B12 - These vitamins are crucial for liver detoxification pathways and methylation, which is one of the body's most common biochemical processes. Good food sources include oily fish, sunflower seeds, chestnuts, walnuts, lentils, black eyed peas, navy beans, oats, barley, kale, spinach, greens, broccoli, avocado, bananas and fresh coconut.

Avoid trans fats - Trans fats are found in some processed foods that contain vegetable and seed oils that have been heated to a high temperature, so this will include plenty of cakes and biscuits, but most importantly, avoid all margarine or fake butter spreads.

Avoid excess sugar - Excess sugar has damaging effects on the body, including the endocrine system. Avoid over-indulging in cakes, biscuits, sweets, fizzy drinks but also keep an eye on the many processed savoury foods that contain hidden sugars. Download the free Sugar Smart app, which is a useful guide to the sugars lurking in many foods.

Caffeine and alcohol - Caffeine is a stimulant and raises our stress hormones and blood pressure. It can cause havoc with reproductive hormones and blood sugar balancing as well. In addition, caffeine is diuretic and depletes essential nutrients. Tea, chocolate and fizzy drinks also contain caffeine. Whereas alcohol puts strain on the liver, which is busy trying to manage any excess hormones.

Avoid hormone disrupters - Man-made oestrogens (xenoestrogens) are commonly put either directly into foods (through the use of pesticides or food processing) or will accumulate through the food chain. They act like hormones and can disrupt our own delicately balanced endocrine system. To help avoid xenoestrogens do not buy or store food wrapped in plastic containers or cling film, especially hot food. Avoid drinking from plastic bottles (there are alternatives in health food shops or online, which are also much better for the environment). If possible use organic cleaning products, toiletries and food.

Reduce stress

Although easier said than done, this is key in allowing your body to maintain its natural state of balance. When we are stressed, we release a hormone called cortisol, which will eventually lead to the disruption of other hormones in the body, particularly reproductive hormones. It may be helpful to actively take up an activity such as yoga, gentle exercise or meditation to try and help give your mind a rest.

Sources and further information: Marilyn Glenville (2001) The Nutritional Health Handbook for Women, www.drnorthrup.com