How Long Should Hormones Be Used?

> One of the most common questions I am asked is: “How long should hormones be used?”

To answer this question, it is important to briefly understand what hormones are and what they do for us.

Hormones are chemical messengers made by the body that help every organ and tissue communicate and function properly. They act as the body's coordination and communication system — helping maintain balance, repair, adaptation, and healthy regeneration throughout life.

Estradiol and progesterone are two hormones primarily produced by the ovaries. These are not simply “reproductive hormones.” They are vital hormones that influence nearly every system in the body, and their levels are directly connected to overall health, vitality, and quality of life. As these hormones decline, many aspects of aging and degeneration accelerate.

Testosterone is also an important hormone for women. Approximately half is produced by the ovaries and half by the adrenal glands. After menopause, testosterone production continues mainly through the adrenal glands, so levels usually decline more gradually than estradiol and progesterone.

WHAT EACH HORMONE DOES

Estradiol

One of the body's most protective and regenerative hormones. It supports brain function, memory, mood, temperature regulation, sleep quality, circulation, skin elasticity, joint comfort, muscle function, and bone strength. It also helps maintain healthy blood vessel function and supports the body's ability to repair and regenerate tissues over time.

Progesterone

Works together with estradiol and has important calming, stabilizing, and protective effects throughout the body and brain. It supports restful sleep, helps regulate the nervous system, promotes emotional balance, supports healthy brain function, and contributes to maintaining healthy tissues, including the uterus and breast tissue.

Testosterone

Produced in much lower levels in women than in men. In healthy physiologic levels, it contributes to energy, motivation, mental drive, muscle strength, exercise tolerance, libido, sexual responsiveness, mood, confidence, and overall sense of well-being. It also helps maintain lean muscle mass, supports healthy metabolism, and contributes to bone and cognitive health.

A NOTE ON BALANCE

Testosterone must be used carefully and thoughtfully. Excessively high testosterone levels may create temporary feelings of increased energy or libido, but over time can contribute to harmful metabolic effects and unwanted physical changes. The goal should never be excessively high hormone levels, but rather balanced, physiologic levels that support long-term health and healthy aging.

MY PERSPECTIVE

Many healthcare providers have told my patients that it is “unnatural” to have estradiol and progesterone after menopause. While technically true, I believe this statement can be misleading when viewed in the broader context of medicine and aging.

Aging, degeneration, and eventually death are natural parts of life. However, modern medicine does not simply ignore the diseases and degenerative conditions that naturally occur with aging — it treats them. Physicians routinely treat diabetes with insulin or medications, replace thyroid hormone when needed, perform surgeries, prescribe blood pressure medications, and intervene in countless other age-related conditions in order to preserve health, function, dignity, and quality of life.

In my opinion, given the profound effects that declining estradiol, progesterone, and testosterone have on the brain, bones, muscles, blood vessels, sleep, mood, and overall vitality, it is reasonable for many women to continue carefully supervised hormone replacement therapy for as long as they desire to maintain health, function, dignity, and quality of life.

As with all areas of medicine, treatment should be individualized, carefully monitored, and thoughtfully balanced for long-term safety and well-being.

Have questions about hormone therapy?

Speak with Dr. Selma Rashid and our team about whether hormone replacement therapy is appropriate for you.

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