

Natural Health News

What's All the Buzz About Bioidentical Hormones?

Lately, there's been a lot of media attention on bioidentical, or natural, hormone therapy to relieve menopause symptoms—such as hot flashes, insomnia, depression, osteoporosis and heart disease. Since a 2002 National Institutes of Health (NIH) study found a linkage between conventional hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and cancer, dementia, and other serious ailments, women are increasingly turning to natural hormones as a potentially less risky way of treating menopause symptoms and decreasing their risk of serious disease.

What are hormones?

Hormones are potent substances; it takes only a small amount of a given hormone to initiate an action, such as growth, development, or mental functions. Only cells that are sensitive to a specific hormone, called the target tissue, will respond to that hormone's particular chemical signal. Traveling through the blood, hormones enter cells through receptor sites, much as a key unlocks a door. Only the right hormone key fits the receptor lock to initiate the cellular functions it regulates.

Natural, or bioidentical, hormones are biochemically and molecularly identical to a

human hormone, and function exactly like those that the body produces. The molecular structure, the key, is indistinguishable from the body's natural hormones, so it's identical to the hormones it's intended to replace and therefore, fits the "lock."

How are they different from conventional HRT?

Synthetic hormones are intentionally different than natural hormones. Because drug companies can't patent a natural substance, they synthetically produce hormones that are slightly different. A synthetic hormone, like a non-identical key, doesn't exactly match the body's natural hormone structure. However, it's similar enough that the receptor site recognizes part of it. By-products of synthetic hormones may linger in the body longer, having a negative affect on receptor sites and possibly contributing to adverse side effects. The small but important mis-match between synthetic and natural hormones may be the cause of some or all of conventional HRT's side effects.

Are bioidentical hormones better than synthetic hormones?

Many doctors believe that bioidentical hormones are an effective and potentially safer

alternative to conventional HRT drugs. It is thought that when bioidentical hormones enter the blood stream, they interact with the body's cells in exactly the same fashion as our own hormones do. As a result, natural hormones are often better tolerated than their synthetic counterparts, with fewer side effects reported.

Are bioidentical hormones right for me?

The decision to use hormone replacement should only be made after the risks and benefits have been fully weighed. The great majority of women can rebalance their hormones without the use of HRT, natural or synthetic. Most women can find relief from common menopause symptoms through a combination of diet, exercise, lifestyle and stress management, as well as high quality nutritional supplements, herbs and acupuncture. If hormones are necessary, bioidentical hormones, used for the shortest time possible, may be ideal, preferably in a compounded form personalized to each woman's needs.

If you want further information, please call the clinic to schedule an appointment with one of our naturopathic doctors.

by Erika Horowitz, ND

What Could Be Better Than Soup?

At this time of year, I find myself recommending soup to many of my patients. Hot soup in the winter helps to warm the body from the inside out. If you tend to get the shivers or have to wear lots of extra layers, getting the warmth to the inside may be just what you need. Holding the bowl in your hands can warm your fingers while you enjoy the aroma, too.

Making soup is easy. It is a classic example of one pot cooking. By making a large batch, you can have leftovers for the rest of the week. Consider cooking in a big crock pot for stews, too.

Michele's Minestrone

Saute in large heavy pot:

- 2 Tbs. olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 tsp. each salt, basil, oregano
- 1 cup celery, chopped
- 1 cup carrots, chopped

Add:

- 6 cups veg. stock or water
- 1 cup green beans, chopped
- 2 cups cooked beans (kidney, garbanzo, or white beans)
- 2 cups swiss chard, chopped

When vegetables are cooked, add:

- 2-1/2 cups tomato puree or 1 qt. chopped canned tomatoes
- 1 tsp. seasoning or sea salt

Bring to a boil and add:

- 1/2 cup small whole grain pasta (such as veggie elbows)

Cook until pasta is done. Just before serving add:

- 1/2 cup chopped parsley

It's easy to digest. When your digestion is not functioning well, ease the burden by eating soups. Cooking the soup begins the breakdown process, making it easy to extract the nutrients. Meats can be cooked for several hours to make the protein more accessible.

Soups are a great way to increase your water intake. Keeping up your fluids during the winter will help with dry skin and improve your immunity.

Boost your soup with these healthy additions:

- Greens – Chlorophyll is the energy and nutrient powerhouse of the plant world.
- Garlic and ginger – Spices can add flavor and boost your immune system.
- Whole grains – Increase fiber with whole grains such as barley,

Russian Borscht

This is a superb liver and gallbladder tonic.

Saute in large heavy pot:

- 2 Tbs. olive oil or butter:
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, sliced

Add: 2 cups diced beets

- 2 cups diced potato
- 6 cups water

When beets are tender, add:

- 3 cups cabbage, sliced or shredded
- 1 small can tomato paste
- 1 tsp. dill weed
- 1/2 tsp. caraway seed
- 1 Tbs. cumin; 1 Tbs. honey
- 1 Tbs. apple cider vinegar
- 2 tsp. seasoning or sea salt

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quinoa, brown rice or oats.

- Bone broths – Slow cooking bones adds high levels of minerals to any broth.
- Miso – Adding miso at the end of cooking provides a source of live probiotics (good bacteria) and a nice earthy, salty flavor.

by Amy Day, ND

recipes by Michele Hangee-Bauer

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