

Natural Ways to Approach Hormonal Fluctuations:

"Self-care is never a selfish act - it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch." Parker Palmer

Hormonal fluctuations are common and often unpredictable in women from puberty to menopause. Fortunately, if we make healthy changes a priority throughout our lives, managing hormonal symptoms will often be smoother. This article focuses on addressing hormonal issues during the transition through perimenopause and menopause. However, the principles for addressing hormonal issues are the same if you are in your 20's or 40's.

I often get the request, "help me with a natural approach to my hormonal symptoms." For some women that means they want bio-identical hormones, for some that means supplements and for some it means lifestyle and dietary changes. Addressing symptoms is not a "one size fits all". You will feel your best if you address each of these areas. The best way to start depends on how you feel AND what you WILL do. I prefer to start with lifestyle changes however, if you are miserable, you may need to start with medications.

There is so much information about hormonal fluctuations and management, much of it is conflicting, incorrect or causes undue fear and anxiety. What helps one woman may not work for another and what may work now may not work in a year (remember hormones can fluctuate unpredictably). This article focuses primarily on healthy diet, exercise, sleep and stress management. Vitamins, supplements and alternative treatments are included. Many women benefit from taking hormones, however, this is beyond the scope of this article.

Peri-menopause: The stage before menopause when a woman is still having periods but hormonal fluctuations are occurring. The imbalance is usually too much estrogen and too little progesterone. Some women have terrible symptoms and some have none. Notice: no defined time frame, so different for every woman.

Menopause: No periods x 1 year, average age is 51.

Post-menopause: After menopause

Common symptoms:

- change in frequency and flow of periods (sometimes heavy and sometimes light)
- hot flashes, night sweats
- trouble sleeping (falling asleep and staying asleep)
- mood swings, irritability, depression, anxiety
- foggy thinking
- irregular heartbeat
- Joint aches
- fatigue
- hair loss/thinning/facial hair
- vaginal dryness, decreased sex drive
- Bladder symptoms - urge or leaking
- weight gain especially around the midsection or difficulty losing weight.
- sexual difficulties or disinterest reported by women during and after menopause are more associated with psychosocial factors than hormonal status, in particular

psychological well-being and relationships as well as impact of society's view of sex, aging and femininity. Shifting self esteem and body image often interfere with libido, as can change in perceptions of a partner's appearance. Relationship challenges can dramatically impact libido.

Are my symptoms only related to my female hormones?

There is a good chance that even if your symptoms are due to changes in your female hormones, other issues like stress or untreated thyroid problems, insulin resistance or diabetes will worsen these symptoms, so you will feel your best when you address all related issues. For many women, dealing with each one of these groups and not just female hormones will bring the most relief.

There are 4 groups of hormones that can interact to worsen female hormonal symptoms if unbalanced: blood sugar and blood sugar hormones (insulin and glucagon), stress hormones (cortisol, adrenaline), thyroid hormones and female hormones (estrogen, progesterone and testosterone).

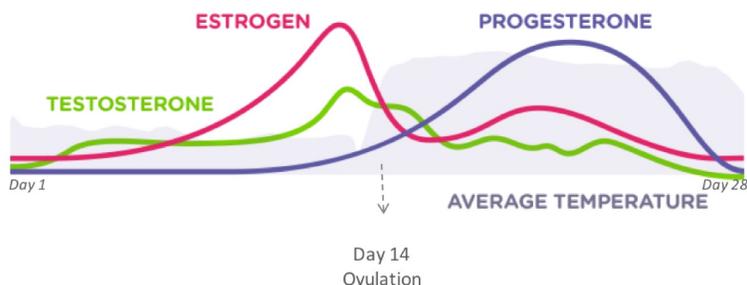
The following are examples of interactions between these hormone groups.

- Two women have hot flashes, one is post-menopausal with low estrogen and the second woman is perimenopausal and eating too many carbs. I could give both of them estrogen and both would feel better but the second one will feel better by changing her diet.
- Women who are overweight or obese (BMI>25) have a greater imbalance in hormone levels. Each fat cell produces a weak estrogen and that results in too much estrogen and testosterone and not enough progesterone. As testosterone increases, it causes further imbalance of estrogen and progesterone and increases insulin resistance and diabetes. Insulin resistance causes more weight gain... Vicious cycle!
- Fluctuations in blood sugar triggers hormone symptoms.

Stress Hormones: Stress hormones, cortisol, adrenaline and norepinephrine are made in our adrenal glands, tiny glands that sit on top of our kidneys. If we are under stress (physical OR emotional), our body will prioritize making stress hormones over sex hormones, EVERY TIME! That leads to low progesterone, low testosterone and high or fluctuating estrogen, this happens throughout a woman's life, not just around menopause. This can trigger infertility, PMS and PCOS. For most women, supporting the adrenals by reducing stress allows our body to make more female hormones. So instead of giving hormones, managing stress allows our bodies to produce hormones correctly! There are different types of stressors: emotional stress (anxiety, fear, relational issues...), physical stress (disease, too little or too much exercise, less than 8 hours of sleep/night, food allergies...), chemical stressors (tobacco, blood sugar fluctuations from skipping meals or too many carbs, caffeine...). Both types of stress negatively affects our bodies. The lifestyle recommendations in this article will support your adrenal glands and lead to feeling better.

Monitoring Symptoms and Benefits of Treatment: Many women find it helpful to keep a calendar of their periods and symptoms (symptom calendars, apps such as Apple health); this helps you identify symptoms and triggers (ex. stress, sugar binge, periods, ovulation, insomnia...).

Normal Menstrual Cycle: The graph below shows normal hormone levels throughout a normal menstrual cycle:



LAB WORK: Depending on symptoms, lab work can be helpful (not all of the following are necessary for every woman). Timing of checking labs, especially hormones is very important, there are certain times of the month when hormone levels are normally low. If you are having periods, the best time to check hormones is day 21 of a 28d cycle. **Birth control pills suppress hormone levels so testing while on birth control pills is not accurate!**

- Tests for diabetes and insulin resistance
- Thyroid function tests
- Vitamin D - most women are deficient
- Vitamin B12 - many women are low
- Testosterone
- Progesterone
- Estradiol
- Cortisol in the a.m.
- DHEA-S
- FSH/LH

Weight gain: Why do women experience weight gain in their 40s and 50s? Women are frustrated because they haven't changed their diet or exercise routine and so they are caught off guard when they start gaining weight. Weight gain is often due to the following factors:

- **Stress:** direct and indirect. Direct effect: stress leads to cortisol production that signals your body to hold onto fat, especially belly fat, cortisol triggers insulin that leads to holding onto belly fat. Indirect effect: when under stress women often drop healthy habits like exercise or increase unhealthy habits like comfort eating, drinking alcohol...Stress includes emotional stress (depression, anxiety) AND physical stress (being ill, overweight, diabetic, over-exercising), BOTH have the same negative affect on our body.
- **Activity:** Americans are less active and working from home adds to inactivity. Studies show that after age 30, exercise alone won't lead to weight loss for most women, it only helps maintain weight or minimize weight gain.
- **Loss in muscle mass** is normal as we age, muscle loss means we burn fewer calories. Strength training and increased protein intake helps metabolism.
- **High sugar intake** (many people don't realize how much sugar they eat, sugar is in processed foods, dairy products, fast food, sodas, fruit juices and sports drinks). As weight increases the body has a harder time regulating blood sugar so it makes more insulin that causes more weight gain.

So stubborn belly fat is related to: increased Insulin (due to sugar + unhealthy fat) + cortisol (due to STRESS) + excess testosterone and low or high estrogen (hormonal changes) = belly fat.

Best way to get rid of belly fat?

- **Reduce Sugar and unhealthy fat** to lower insulin
 - Sugar - see section below on carbs, avoid processed foods. AVOID: too low-calorie, too low-carb, or too low-fat because these cause stress. Finding balance in your nutrition reduces physical stress and helps weight loss.
 - Fat - see section below on fat intake, avoid trans fat, avoid processed foods (healthy fat in moderation is good)
- **Reduce Stress:** it's the multiplier. **Stress** releases cortisol and cortisol added to insulin triggers belly fat. Chronic stress also cause negative downstream affects on your thyroid and female hormone symptoms. **Stress** increases cravings and contributes to muscle loss. Many women feel they are doing everything right and still struggling with belly fat: address stress! **The typical dieting mentality: eat less (cut calories) and exercise more won't help your belly fat.** This is a hard concept for most women. We often equate stress with emotional upset. We think that if we don't feel anxious or depressed we are not stressed. Physical stress has the same negative affect on our bodies as emotional stress.
 - **Reduce stress** to burn belly fat.
 - **REST/RECOVERY:** do 3 R&R activities/week, put them on your calendar. Activities: massage, hot baths, sex/physical affection, time with pets/friends, leisure walking especially outside, tai chi, restorative yoga, naps, time outside, earthing (walk barefoot on the ground ~15-30 min) and prayer, meditation, mindfulness.
 - **Movement:** shoot for 10,000 steps/d
 - **Sleep:** you may have to choose between late night activities or a flat tummy. Best benefit: go to bed before 10pm and get 7-8 hours/night.
 - **Eat Less/Exercise Less OR Eat More/Exercise More. Eating less and exercising more is a stressor to your body.** Try less/exercise less:
 - **Diet:** eat 3 meals/d, 2 contain only protein and veggies (or you can do a shake), and 1(preferably dinner) add small portion of carbs.
 - **Exercise** 3-5x/week, you want to maintain strength (not lose muscle) so do strength exercises ~15 min 3x/wk. Plan the day after strenuous exercise to do a R&R activity.

Weight gain increases risk for heart disease, stroke, breast cancer, diabetes and arthritis AND bottom line, most women just feel bad when they gain weight!

Weight gain is often associated with a decline in self esteem, not feeling well leads to decline in motivation and self esteem. **My goal is to help women change their path towards greater health and vitality. Your goal is thriving, not just surviving!**

Nutritional Changes

Why look at food FIRST? Our bodies run on food! The food choices we make have an affect on every function in our body, every time we eat. We need healthy food packed with nutrition for energy! We put the right fuel in our car, why not do the same for our bodies?

Eating nutritious foods is becoming more challenging due to changes in food sources: more sugar, bigger portions, more preservatives, farming practices that make even fresh fruits and veggies less nutritious. Increased use of gluten as fillers in all sorts of food isn't healthy. ***Did you know that even though the quantity of food we eat has increased, the quality has decreased and that many Americans have nutritional deficiencies, even if they are overweight? Only 5-10% of Americans eat the recommended amount of vegetables/day.***

Remember, the goal is for you to feel better and be healthier. Making lasting changes can be difficult. Several suggestions: try 2 or 3 changes. Set a timeframe for your change such as 3-4 weeks; it can take 4 weeks to see benefits from changes. Make sure you will do the change before you make them a goal. Write down and monitor these changes, keeps you accountable. Assess progress weekly. ***No one is motivated all the time so accountability is also important.*** Suggestions for accountability: do this with a friend, weigh once a week, personal trainer, or interactive weight loss apps. ***Getting stressed and overwhelmed about a goal that isn't working is NOT the goal, feeling better and being healthier IS the goal.***

What diet changes are sustainable? Some women are more successful with elimination diets then add back and some women prefer slowly reducing "the bad stuff". In my experience, the best results are with elimination diets especially if you are trying to improve hormonal symptoms, it can be more difficult at the beginning, so you will be more successful if you take time to carefully plan before starting an elimination diet. All healthy changes "stick better" if you plan and keep yourself accountable.

The way we eat and timing affects our weight and how we feel. To improve absorption of nutrients, sit down when you eat, chew carefully and eat slow. Make the last meal the smallest and eating before 7pm is associated with less weight gain/weight loss.

Cravings: Many people can't tell the difference between true hunger, cravings and thirst. Cravings feel like hunger but can be stronger; if you want sweets, unhealthy food or just too much...it's a craving. Many people are mildly dehydrated and that can feel like hunger. If you think you are hungry between meals, drink 8-12 oz of water and go about your business, if you are hungry, you will feel it. Lastly, learn to eat when you are hungry, not starved, if you are starving, you will overeat.

Drink water, at least 60-80 oz/d (half your weight in ounces, ex. if you are 150 lb then drink 75 oz). Avoid/minimize: alcohol, caffeine, sodas (diet and non-diet both cause weight gain), juices and sports drinks. Minimize the amount you drink with meals.

A. Healthy diet (the way we should eat if we want health and vitality): Eating nutritious foods is just as important as avoiding unhealthy foods. Our diet should be a balance of protein, complex carbohydrates, fresh vegetables and low glycemic fruits. A popular diet, intermittent fasting, where you eat during a 8 hour window in 24 hours often means a meal is skipped, either breakfast or dinner. There are some studies that show if you skip breakfast, you may gain weight, so if you try intermittent fasting, be careful and monitor your weight closely.

1. **Fresh Vegetables: Eat the rainbow.** If you eat a variety, you will get the majority of nutrients you need. Your body uses nutrients from food much better than supplements. Plant based diets decrease the risk of heart disease, stroke and many cancers, either directly by the nutrients or indirectly by reducing weight gain. Goal: 5-10 servings/day. Servings: 1/2c if cooked, 1c if raw.
2. **Fresh fruits:** Fruit is healthy AND contain sugar. Whether sugar is coming from fruit or something else, the final product, glucose triggers insulin the same. Choose low glycemic fruits, goal <55.
3. **Fiber:** Diets high in fiber decrease the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and weight gain. Fiber helps you regulate insulin, blood sugar and helps constipation, (regular bowel movements help you get rid of toxins). The recommended amount is 30-35 grams/d. Good sources: most veggies, beans, peas, prunes, almonds, peanuts, brown rice, fruits, chia, ground flaxseed 2T/d. **Read food labels.** If you don't eat 30 grams/d, increase slowly or you may experience bloating or gas.
4. **Fat:** Avoid unhealthy fat, increase healthy fat
 - a. **Avoid Saturated and trans fat.** 40% of intake of these fats are from fast food, store bought cakes, cookies, pies, crackers and white bread. **Read food labels OR don't buy packaged/processed food.**
 - b. **Eat healthy fats:** Mono-unsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) are a healthy type of fat. MUFAs reduce the risk of heart disease, lowers total cholesterol without lowering good cholesterol, HDL. MUFAs help control blood sugar and insulin. Be careful with the amount, they are high in calories. **Read food labels.** Examples include:
 - Oils: Olive, coconut or flaxseed oil
 - Nuts/nut butter: almonds, cashews, pecans, peanuts, macadamia, pistachios
 - Seeds: chia, sesame, pumpkin, sunflower, ground flaxseed
 - Other: avocados, olives, eggs, dark chocolate, organic chicken/beef.
5. **Whole grains:** Grains fall into 2 categories, whole grains (complex carbs) and refined grains (simple carbs).
 - a. **Complex carbohydrates** (high in fiber, improves digestion, provides energy):
 - Whole grains include the entire grain kernel such as whole wheat flour, bulgur, oatmeal, brown rice, quinoa,

whole wheat cereal, whole wheat bread, tortillas or spaghetti. **MOST PROCESSED FOODS** don't use whole grains even if stated on the label, **make sure whole wheat is at the top of the ingredient list.**

- Other sources of complex carbs: fruits and veggies, some can be a good source of protein as well: bananas, carrots, chickpeas, beans (navy, kidney, pinto), sweet potatoes, lentils.

b. **Refined grains** are processed to remove the bran and germ. Eating these increase blood sugar and insulin causing you to store that sugar as fat, leading to weight gain. It has a finer texture and longer shelf life but this process removes fiber, iron, and many B vitamins. Examples: white flour, bread, rice, couscous, flour tortillas, pitas, sweets.

6. **Protein intake:** Goal: 80-100 gm/d for most to maintain, if you want to build muscle mass you may need more. (0.6gm- 1gm of protein per pound of body weight/d, ex if you weigh 150 lb, the range: 90-150 gm)

- **Lean meat:** poultry, fish or grass fed organic beef (limit to 3-4 oz, size of a deck of cards!).
- **Vegetarian sources:** legumes, beans, nuts, tofu, chickpeas, chia seeds, natural nut butters, tempeh.
- **Other sources:** eggs, fat free plain yogurt or Greek yogurt (dairy can be a good source of protein but best to limit, watch out for added sugars). Protein powder.

7. **Calorie intake:** Calorie intake is based on age, weight, gender, height and activity level. The following calculator:

can help you figure out your basic metabolic rate, this helps you figure out the amount of calories you need in a day. **IMPORTANT: You won't lose weight and maintain weight loss if you are cutting calories AND eating unhealthy processed food.** If you limit calories too much you will slow down your metabolism and when you increase your calories again, you will gain more weight.

It's not just about the calorie but also the nutritional benefit. For example, you can eat a snack that has the same calories, such as an apple compared to a snack of crackers or cookies. The apple, because it has nutrients and fiber that is recognized by your body, it will be processed mostly as energy, not fat. The other snack since it is processed and not recognized as nutrition, whether it is cookies, chips or crackers, it will increase insulin more than the apple which leads to storing these calories as fat. Same calorie snack but one results in storing fat and the other making energy. Give me the apple!

B. Foods to eliminate:

1. **Added sugar:** *If this is the only change you make, it is worth it!!!* Foods that cause blood sugar spikes cause weight gain, increase hormone symptoms, fatigue, irritability and brain fog. *I see many patients come in complaining of hormonal symptoms and they reduce their hormonal symptoms by > 50% just by reducing simple carbs!!! In the typical American diet, 21% of simple sugars come from soft drinks, 18% come from sweets, 13% come from desserts, 10% come from ice cream, pudding, yogurts and other milk products, 6% come from breads, and 5% come from breakfast cereals.* Avoid high fructose corn syrup. **READ LABELS. How do you beat sugar cravings?** The following ways can help control sugar cravings. Stress and hormone imbalance makes cravings harder to control.

- When do you crave sugar the most? Eliminate access to junk during that time
- Add protein and healthy fat to every meal/snack
- When you have the craving, drink 8-12 oz of water and walk away
- Decrease alcohol and caffeine
- **AVOID sodas:** sugar or diet cause you to eat more and increase cravings, **sodas have ZERO health benefit!**
- Managing stress can help women have reductions in cravings - mindfulness, deep breathing, distraction (such as go for a walk, spending time with friends)
- Herbal supplement (*don't use if pregnant, breast feeding, diabetes, on diabetes meds like metformin*)
 - glutamine 500-1000mg empty capsule on your tongue when you have a craving
 - Sweet Defeat lozenges on your tongue when you have a craving (by Sweet Defeat) - changes the taste of sugar so it isn't appetizing
 - Gymnema 200 mg 1-2x/day can help suppress cravings
 - Metabolic Xtra by Pure Encapsulations (PE)

Two approaches to decrease sugar intake:

- **Limit sugar:** < 6 teaspoons or 25gm/d. **READ FOOD LABELS.** Look at the number of carbs per serving (servings are smaller than you think).
 - **Avoid "low fat"** since sugar is added to improve the taste, low fat food cause weight gain.
 - **Avoid sugar substitutes:** even though they are low calorie, they trigger insulin and weight gain.
 - **Glycemic index (GI):** look up food on www.glycemicindex.com or glycemic app. Goal is GI <55. The GI tells us how a food affects blood sugar. A high glycemic food will significantly increase your blood sugar leading to significant increase in insulin (higher insulin leads to higher fat storage, especially around the midsection). Look up your top favorite 30 foods, if the GI is high, choose another in the same food group with lower GI. For example, watermelon has a high GI, so instead eat berries. If you eat something with a GI of ~55-65, add protein and healthy fat, that will lower the insulin spike, for example, add a small handful of nuts or 1 tablespoon of nut butter.
2. **Gluten:** Gluten is a common filler in processed food. Most people can tolerate gluten in food naturally but can't tolerate the large amount used as fillers. Gluten can cause

many symptoms and the results of eliminating gluten can be amazing. If gluten is an issue for you, you may feel better within a week but it may take 3-4 weeks. Eliminating gluten means eating: fresh fruits, fresh veggies, lean meats, nuts, beans and avoiding processed foods. If you don't feel better after eliminating gluten for 3-4 weeks, it may not be a problem for you.

3. Dairy: People as they age become intolerant to lactose. If you have any stomach issues, eliminating dairy may make you feel better, after 3-4 weeks, you can slowly add back. (Watch out for added sugars in dairy products)

4. Alcohol: There are health benefits in moderate alcohol intake (defined as 1 drink/d for women) but too much increases the risk of heart disease, breast cancer and liver disease/cancer. Alcohol damages the liver, we depend on our liver and kidneys to clear toxins from our blood! Alcohol increases hormone symptoms, especially night sweats and hot flashes. Alcohol increases sugar craving, lowers sleep quality, and causes weight gain. You will feel better if you reduce or eliminate alcohol intake, try it for a month, see how you feel. Do you want the drink or lose the belly fat?

What is the quickest way to see how food affects your symptoms?

- **Elimination diet!** It's very effective. Whole 30, IFM elimination diet
- **Assess GI symptoms** to see if your gut is healthy - do you have diarrhea, constipation, heartburn, nausea, bloating?

Exercise:

Just move!!! Start out with what you enjoy for any amount of time. Best question to ask yourself: what will I do? Consider starting 15-30 mins of exercise 3x/week, then increase time or intensity. Start slow especially if you are out of shape or have injuries so you won't get hurt. A helpful rule is the "10% rule": increase time or intensity by 10% every week. Remember: pick a realistic plan that you WILL do.

Even if you are in shape, high intensity may not be the best choice because it causes stress to the body and increases injury. Scientific studies show that exercise alone does not lead to weight loss in women over 30. It is more likely to help you maintain weight but not lose weight. Exercise does make you feel good, it is the most effective natural remedy for depression and anxiety!!!

1. **Cardio:** sweat and burn calories, release endorphins to improve mood and sleep. Cardio with lower risk of injuries: bike, walk, hike, swim, elliptical.
2. **Yoga, Pilates or Barre:** increases strength and cardio, balance, body awareness, improves hot flashes, sleep issues, and emotional symptoms.
3. **Strength training:** include upper body, lower body, and core 2-3x/week. Goal >15 min per session. Ideas: personal trainer, home options include fitness bands, hand weights, yoga ball, TRX system, Peloton, Beach Body on Demand. We lose muscle mass as we age, building lean muscle mass helps our metabolism and helps our body process sugar more efficiently to decrease weight gain.

STRESS REDUCTION:

In studies, 75% of women have moderate to severe stress. Stress is one of the hardest areas to control but also one of the most important for vitality and energy. Stress causes an increase in cortisol and adrenaline, cortisol triggers insulin release, insulin causes fat storage. Having too much cortisol for too long will also cause fatigue.

1. How do we manage stressors? What are the facts:

- There are 24 hours in a day.
- We require food, sleep and movement to survive.
- For most women, the biggest stressor is that they are doing too much. Removing one thing from the "to do" list won't give you enough margin, you have to remove or change more.
- Remember, too many good things create stress; "good stressors" such as strenuous exercise can cause the same changes in our bodies as "bad stressors".
- When my husband went to a more flexible work schedule to be available for our child, he wrote down EVERYTHING we do on a spreadsheet & we "reassigned" duties. We knew "our duties" and for the most part, we did the things we preferred (yes I cook!).

2. Practical ways to manage stress

- **FIRST** stop and breathe. Deep breathing slows your heart rate and puts you in a relaxed state. Breathe 4x: inhale for a count of 4, hold for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 4 or deep breathing for 1-3 minutes 2x/d or when you are anxious or stressed.
- Don't automatically say yes when someone asks you to do something. Think about it. Remember when you say Yes, you are saying No to something else. When I say yes to something, that means I am saying no to family or needed personal time... that makes me pause and rethink a Yes. There are only 24 hours in a day!
- Multi-tasking - there is no such thing as multi-tasking, we can't do more than one thing at a time, don't kid yourself, you are not present when you try. I like the analogy of being a computer with windows open, when you have too many open, you don't see them all and your computer is slower.
- Meditation or Prayer- Meditation is not a way to control thoughts or have no thoughts but to direct thoughts. Prayer focuses direction of thoughts.
- Mindfulness/Gratitude practice-practicing forgiveness and showing gratitude has been shown to reduce stress
- Gentle exercise
- LAUGH
- Spend time with friends or pets
- Earthing- walk barefoot on the ground 15-30 min/d
- Be outside every day

3. Diet changes to reduce affects of stress:

- Low glycemic foods <55 or <25 gm added sugar/d
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, tobacco, soda
- Increase MUFAs

4. Supplements (chronic stress depletes nutrients our body needs to maintain its healthy functions):

- Omega 3 fatty acids 2-4 gm/d
- B complex
- Magnesium 400-800 mg before bed
- Theanine 200 mg nightly or when anxious
- Adaptogens such as ashwaganda or chasteberry

SLEEP:

Sleep is when our body restores itself. Studies show that <10% of humans thrive on < 7 hours of sleep. 40% of women have sleep disturbances.

Have a bedtime routine to slow down for the hour before bed, most people can't run like crazy, hop into bed and fall asleep

- Consider reading a book before bed (NOT on a device)
- Deep breathing exercise: 4 breaths of 4-5-6, breathe in for count of 4, hold for count of 5, exhale for count of 6
- Prayer or meditation (2x/d better)
- Healthy circadian rhythm helps maintain better sleep: Try to go to bed the same time every night, best by 10pm, get up the same time every morning, best way to start going to bed earlier is to first get up earlier by setting an earlier alarm for the morning, see info below
- Avoid sleeping with pets
- Make sure you have comfortable pillows and mattress
- Make sure the temperature is comfortable: 65- 66 deg, if night sweats consider cooler or layers. If cold, wear socks.
- Avoid TV/screen time for 1 hour bf bed, avoid bright alarm clocks- causes stimulation to the brain so it takes longer to fall asleep. Use eye covers if needed.
- Warm shower before bed: sleepy and relaxed.

Morning routine to wake up slowly/gently:

- Set alarm for about 7 am, hit a 10 minute snooze x1
- During the snooze: deep breathing, meditate/pray, avoid jumping up, avoid immediately checking the phone.
- Use a light box (10,000 lux for 30 min/day), prefer in the morning OR get 30 min of natural light/day
- Walk in the am

Lose excess weight - weight gain is associated with sleep apnea that causes daytime fatigue and brain fog.

White noise - fan

Food:

- Avoid sugar/alcohol at night- increases stress hormones that affect sleep and increases hot flashes/night sweats
- Avoid big/heavy dinners, eat >3 hrs before bed, eat complex carbs -whole grains or sweet potato, helps you fall asleep faster
- If you get hungry at night try a small snack 1 hr before bed- protein and complex carb.
- Avoid ALL caffeine after noon
- Minimize fluids before bed to avoid waking up to pee, go to the bathroom right before bed

Avoid prescription meds for sleep - can be habit forming and cause memory loss. They can help you fall asleep faster, so occasional use may be fine in certain situations.

Restless leg syndrome: Magnesium bf bed and iron

Exercise but not within 2 hours of going to bed. Strength, Yoga, tai chi may be especially helpful.

Herbal teas such as chamomile, lemon balm + Passion flower 320mg (especially if you have anxiety), lavender. My favorite is Golden milk by Garden of Life(add to warm almond milk).

Avoid naps after 4pm and > 90 min, affects night time sleep.

If you are tossing and turning, get up and do something calming such as reading.

SUPPLEMENTS: (some may interact with other supplements or meds, use lowest effective dose)

Fall asleep faster:

- ☐ Melatonin- take 30 min before bed, start with 1 mg, if not helping after 3 nights, try 3-5 mg, works only if you sleep in a pitch black room, can help jet lag
- ☐ L-Theanine 200 mg before bed (calming)
- ☐ 5-HTP 50-300 mg bf bed, don't use if you are on an antidepressant or if pregnant
- ☐ Magnesium 400-800 mg bf bed (May cause diarrhea)
- ☐ Valerian 450 mg within 1 hour bf bed, helps anxiety and muscle tension, some women can feel wired
- ☐ Lavela(lavender oil) 80mg bf bed (anxiety/relaxation)
- ☐ Phosphatidyl Serine - 150mg bf bed, ok to increase to 500, helps you unwind

Decrease waking up at night:

- ☐ 5-HTP 50-100 mg before bed (don't take if on an antidepressant)
- ☐ Muscle Cramp Tension (Magnesium, lemon balm, chamomile, Passion flower) - helps if pain/cramps wake you up at night
- ☐ Ashwaganda 500 mg before bed
- ☐ Hops - 100 mg before bed, may increase depression

Supplements with combo of ingredients:

- ☐ Pure Encapsulations: Best Rest Formula
- ☐ NeuroLink - GABA, 5 HTP, dec time falling asleep and sleep longer
- ☐ Botanicalm PM (Orthomolecular) -Hops, passionflower, valerian

Decrease night time cortisol (wired but tired feeling, getting a second wind at night): phosphatidyl serine, ashwaganda, Relora 500 mg before bed, L theanine, Cortisol Manager before bed (Integrative Therapeutics)

NON-MEDICATION INTERVENTIONS:

- CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy
- Acupuncture

INTERVENTIONS FOR SPECIFIC SYMPTOMS:

1. GENERAL SUPPORT:

- Multivitamin: (PE) Womens Nutrients or ONE MVI
- Omega 3 fatty acids: Klaire or PE
- Vitamin D 1000-2000/d
- Support GI health - Klaire Therbiotic Complete probiotics

2. All Symptoms:

- Massage
- Acupuncture
- Mind/body support: meditation, MBSR, yoga, exercise, light therapy, time in nature, social connection, CBT, EMDR

3. Hot flashes, night sweats, difficulty sleeping

- TRIGGERS TO AVOID: avoid very low calorie diet, caffeine, alcohol especially before bed, high fat meals, avoid blood sugar swings and high sugar intake especially before bed, don't go to bed hungry, manage stress
- Try: yoga, acupuncture, exercise but not within 2 hours before bed, meditation, stop smoking, sleep in cold room, layer clothing to easily remove layers when too hot, deep breathing (1-3 min 2x/d or when anxious or stressed), acupuncture
- Supplements: soy isoflavones 50 mg/d, Pycnogenol 200mg/d, Hops 100 mg nightly (helps anxiety and sleep but for some can increase mood symptoms), Valerian 530 2x/d, black cohosh 80mg/d, Estrovera, Vitex

3. Vaginal Dryness

- Vaginal moisturizers (can use daily): Replens, coconut oil, Luvena
- Lubricants: Replens, coconut oil, slippery stuff
- Vitamin E 400/d (by mouth)
- Supplements: pueraria mirifica - 25-50 mg/d, Sea buckthorn oil 3gm by mouth daily, topical DHEA, Probiotics (Klaire Therbiotic complete and Pro-Flora Womens Probiotic

4. Mood (Depression, anxiety, mood swings): see #2 above

- Movement: yoga, gentle exercises
- Deep breathing: quickest way to access the calming hormones your body makes
- Recenter yourself: Meditation/mindfulness/prayer
- Supplements: Ashwaganda, GABA, Emotional Wellness combo (PE)- GABA, 5HT, vit B6, Lavela(lavender oil) 80mg before bed, St John's Wort 300 mg 3x/d
- See section on stress management

5. Insomnia: see section on sleep

6. Fluid Retention: decrease salt- avoid soft drinks, processed foods, chips

7. Supplements for **ALL SYMPTOMS**: (Use lowest dose that help, more is not necessarily better)

- Nutridyn: Menopause Support or Perimenopausal Support
- Metagenics: Estrovera 1-2 tabs/d
- Femmenessence Maca Life (perimenopausal) and Macapause (menopause), Maca helps energy and sex drive for some

- Black Cohosh 80 mg/d
- Black Cohosh + St Johns Wort 300mg 3x/d may help more when taken together (don't take if on anti-depressant)
- Progesterone capsules (prescription) helps sleep, 100-200 mg/night
- Pycnogenol - 200 mg nightly

8. Low sex drive:

- Is sex painful? Treat that!
- Relationship issues?
- Weight changes or your appearance affect your self concept?
- Diet: cut out sugar (low glycemic index foods <55), cut out saturated fat, increase healthy fat, increase lean protein
- Weight loss: reduces the enzyme that turns testosterone into estrogen in fat cells
- **Address stress**
- Increase sleep
- Supplements/vitamins:
 - Ashwaganda (helps adrenals make T) 500/d
 - Maca(increases usable T) 3.5 gm/d
 - DHEA (precursor to T) 2-5mg/d, Metagenics BioSom
 - St John's Wort 300 3x/d
 - Vitamin D3 2000/d
 - Zinc - blocks aromatase (for every 30 mg of Zinc need 2mg of copper)
 - Vitamin B complex

Supplements:

- Supplements aren't FDA regulated which means, they don't have to include what they write on the bottle! Some of the companies I prefer: Pure Encapsulations, Thorne, Nutridyn, Integrative Therapeutics, Metagenics). I have included some specific supplements. Nutrition World is an excellent place to get assistance.
- Supplements: When healthy, our bodies are well oiled machines, our bodily functions only need a specific amount of vitamins to work well so **MORE ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER**, therefore when taking supplements, use lowest effective dose.
- Look for USP symbol: **USP** independently evaluates supplements for quality, purity and potency
- Look for non GMO (Not genetically modified)

