

NUTRITIONAL PROTOCOLS FOR HORMONE BALANCING

Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet, helps with weight management, avoiding or managing chronic disease, and improves hormonal balance. While it might be tempting to eat the Standard American Diet and then supplement with encapsulated vitamins, minerals and nutrients, the bulk of your nutrients should actually come from your food! While supplementation does play an important role, it cannot substitute for a healthy, nutrient-dense diet.

Unfortunately, there are many things working against so many people when it comes to home-cooking and eating nutritious meals. A hectic schedule, lack of access to high-quality and unprocessed foods, chronic pain, fatigue, and a lack of an appetite can all discourage people from cooking and eating healthy meals. It is important to acknowledge potential barriers to a healthy diet, and find ways to overcome them.

Limit Refined Sugars

Let's start by distinguishing between macronutrients and micronutrients.

Macronutrients include carbohydrates, protein, and fats. You know, the "big" molecules that your body needs to perform the basic functions of life.

Micronutrients are the "small" molecules, like vitamins and minerals that your body also needs to function properly. Both micronutrients and macronutrients are important, but for now, let's focus on the macronutrient called carbohydrates.

Carbohydrates provide energy. They contain three components: starch, fiber, and sugar. For now, sugar is our main focus. You see, some carbohydrates are called "simple carbohydrates" because they contain more sugar and less fiber.

Therefore, they are digested faster and used immediately as energy. But these energy highs don't last very long, and are followed by an extreme crash as blood sugar plummets. Complex carbohydrates, on the other hand, contain much more fiber and less sugar than simple carbohydrates, providing more sustainable, less volatile, energy levels.

You may have heard that people should prioritize complex carbohydrates over simple carbohydrates, but the problem is that food labels don't distinguish between the two. That's why it will be important for you to educate your clients about where to find complex carbohydrates and how to avoid simple carbohydrates.

Foods high in complex carbohydrates include: rice, sweet potatoes, beans, legumes, and starchy vegetables (like squash and beets). Foods high in simple carbohydrates (that should be avoided) include many processed, packaged foods and baked goods. These often contained highly-processed “refined” sugars that are less-than-optimal for overall health.

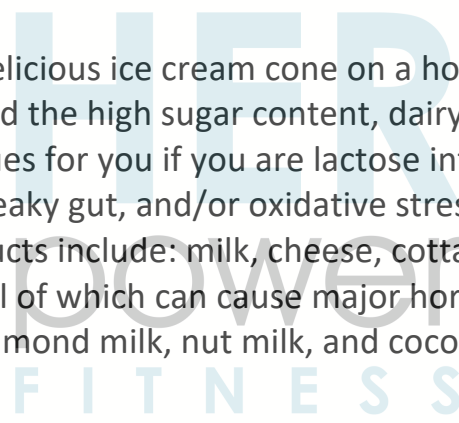
Carbohydrates are important in the diet but one should avoid high glycemic foods. The glycemic index is a value assigned to foods based on how slowly or how quickly they can increase blood glucose levels. Avoid high glycemic index foods by eating complex carbohydrates that don’t cause extreme blood sugar spikes. According to the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, high glycemic index foods include: processed sugars, grains, cereals and the majority of white foods such as pasta, milled flour, white rice, potatoes, and corn. Refined, simple sugar provides limited nutritional value and is high in calories. Therefore, sugar-rich calories are often referred to as “empty calories” – devoid of all nutritional value. Sugar increases one’s daily caloric intake, causing weight gain and tooth decay. Encourage your clients to begin reading nutritional labels to search for added sugars such as dextrose, fructose, sucrose, dextrin, and honey.

Foods with Added Hormones.

Unfortunately, even the healthiest of diets fall prey to an often overlooked toxin - added hormones. If one does not consciously purchase hormone-free or organic food then it’s highly possible that high doses of added hormones are being consumed on a weekly basis. Added hormones are most often found in dairy and meat. To make sure you are not consuming added hormones buy hormone-free, antibiotic-free, free-range, wild-caught and organic food.

Dairy

To most of us, eating a delicious ice cream cone on a hot summer day sounds amazing! But even beyond the high sugar content, dairy is an inflammatory food. Dairy will likely cause issues for you if you are lactose intolerant, lactose sensitive, have respiratory issues, leaky gut, and/or oxidative stress. These common inflammatory dairy products include: milk, cheese, cottage cheese, cream, butter, yogurt, and ice cream - all of which can cause major hormonal imbalances. As dairy replacements, try almond milk, nut milk, and coconut milk.



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Gluten-Free

You might love eating bread, pasta, or pizza but the gluten may be causing a lot of damage to your body. Gluten is a binding protein found in wheat, barley, and rye. Gluten causes a certain degree of inflammation in the small intestines for all of us, but for those with gluten sensitivity, this response is highly noticeable. Trying to follow gluten-free diet might seem tiresome, especially in a culture that over-emphasizes and over-consumes primarily gluten-containing carbohydrates. Now there are many alternatives and options for going gluten-free. Some gluten-free items include brown rice, quinoa, tapioca, amaranth, and gluten-free flours that will still allow you to enjoy pasta, bread, and pizza.

People who suffer from autoimmune diseases, such as Hashimoto's and Graves' disease, may especially benefit from a gluten-free diet. In fact, most autoimmune protocols advocate the complete and total elimination of gluten from the diet. Why? Because most of the immune system is housed in the gut, and its strength is entirely dependent on gut health. If gluten constantly irritates and inflames the gut lining, overtime it can wear down the immune system, triggering an autoimmune response. For this reason, many people with autoimmune disease find that their symptoms improve when they eliminate gluten.

Processed Foods

How easy is it to open a bag of chips or grab a prepackaged sandwich? Convenience, cost, and taste can make eating processed foods feel like a reasonable option. Unfortunately, the many processes and chemicals that transform such food destroy its natural vitamin and mineral content. Some food manufacturers – two words that should never be used together – actually attempt to add vitamins and minerals back into the processed foods in a process called “enrichment.” But these synthetic nutrients are not as easy for the body to absorb.

Another manufacturing process, called fortification, adds vitamins and minerals that you wouldn't naturally find in these foods. Even though processed foods may seem convenient, they do not give the body what it needs to thrive. It is important to carve out the time it takes to begin implementing a whole foods, nutrient-dense diet.

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Toxins

Toxins are in almost everything we eat! You may think that you are making healthy dietary decisions, by biting into a delicious, healthy apple. But unless you focus on food quality, it is likely that even this apple is inundating your body with toxins and chemicals. Organic food doesn't include polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), phthalates, bovine growth hormones, antibiotics, pesticides, fungicides, petrochemical-containing waxes, insecticides, organochlorine pesticides, and altered fruit and vegetable genes. If you aren't eating organic food, there is a high probability that you are eating toxins that are carcinogenic and hormone-altering. And ultimately, they increase the risk for serious diseases and conditions.

Alcohol and Smoking

Generally, smoking and a high intake of alcohol is bad for your health, as it causes oxidative stress and has been shown to have carcinogenic effects. Also, long-term usage affects the liver, lungs, and every other system in the body. Once you quit consuming these harmful toxins, you will have a better chance of regaining hormone balance.

Caffeine

In modern American society, a caffeine addiction is relatively common, but that doesn't make it any less harmful than other addictions. Caffeine is not only found in coffee, it's also in chocolate, tea, soft drinks, and medications. Caffeine is a stimulant of the central nervous system.

Caffeine increases blood sugar levels, increases carbohydrate cravings, affects the gut lining, causes adrenal exhaustion, heightens PMS symptoms, worsens insomnia, causes inflammation, and increases the risk of miscarriage. If you are suffering from hormonal issues such as Hashimoto's, thyroid imbalances, adrenal fatigue, insomnia, or any other hormone-related issues, caffeine can make symptoms even worse.

Goitrogens

Goitrogens are naturally-occurring substances found in some foods that inhibit the synthesis and secretion of thyroid hormones. The foods that contain goitrogens include: raw cabbage, cauliflower, turnips, soybeans, and peanuts. Cooking these foods will deactivate the goitrogenic effects, although some such as soy and peanuts should be avoided due to their phytoestrogenic and thyroid inhibiting effects.

Healthy Fats for Hormone Precursors

For many years, fat has been demonized as the cause of obesity and many other modern diseases. But the truth is that as our consumption of fat has decreased, obesity has increased! Why? Because while fat does have more calories per gram of food than carbohydrates or protein, it is also satiating.

That means that you have to eat less of it to feel full. So in the grand scheme of things, you may actually eat fewer calories if your diet is high in healthy fats. But not all fats are created equal. Trans fat is a man-made fat, popularized in the 1990s, that is always bad – no matter what. In fact, the more trans fat you consume, the more likely you are to die prematurely. The body simply doesn't know what to do with this unnatural fat. But other fats, especially unsaturated fats, are highly important to hormone synthesis because they form the basis of hormonal precursors, like cholesterol.

You can get high-quality fats from both plant and animal sources. Just be sure that the plants, like avocados and flaxseed, are organic, and that the meats are free-range and humanely-raised.

Omega-6 to Omega-3 Ratios

Speaking of fats, two types of polyunsaturated fats include omega-6s and omega-3s. These fats have contrasting effects; omega-6 fats are pro-inflammatory while omega-3 fats are anti-inflammatory. Because they counteract each other, the proper balance of omega-6 to omega-3 is 1:1. The Standard American Diet contains way more omega-6 than Omega-3, which leads to inflammation in the body.

The anti-inflammatory properties of omega-3s are similar to NSAIDs—they help reduce inflammation, stiffness, and joint pain. People with hormonal imbalance likely have underlying chronic inflammation that is making their symptoms worse. Prioritize omega-3s, which are found in cold water fish, flaxseed, hemp, and chia seeds. Limit omega-6s, which are found in corn oil, soy oil, and vegetable oil.

Cruciferous Vegetables

Cruciferous vegetables include: broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, sprouts, turnip, watercress, and radish.

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These vegetables fight against invading toxins and cancer. Broccoli and kale are the superfoods for anti-aging. Broccoli contains sulforaphane, which repairs and prevents cartilage destruction, as well as protects the skin from sun damage. Cruciferous vegetables protect against loss of cognitive function, especially memory loss. These veggies also support bone health and age-related eye issues.

Seed Protocol

Seeds can regulate and support the menstrual cycle by increasing estrogen levels (such as one tablespoon each of flaxseed and pumpkin seeds) in the first half of the cycle and increasing progesterone (such as one tablespoon each of sesame and sunflower seeds) during the latter half of the cycle. Seed rotation is a great holistic approach to try if you are experiencing irregular periods, PMS, perimenopause, menopause, and heavy flow.

Seaweed

Iodine is an important component of T4 and T3. Seaweed is the best natural food source of iodine and examples include: kelp, kombu, nori, and wakame. Eating seaweed is a great method for regulating the thyroid gland and restoring hormonal balance. In fact, due to its salty flavor, you can sprinkle it on top of food as a nutritionally-dense replacement for table salt.

Bone Broth

Throughout history, bone broth has been a staple of many cultures for good reason. Drinking bone broth can regulate hormones by fixing gut health issues. Additionally, it contains the amino acids proline and glycine that are part of the detoxification process, calcium for bone health, and collagen for skin and joint health. But store-bought broth just doesn't cut it. It is easy and inexpensive to make high-quality bone broth right at home. See the additional resources for a bone broth recipe.

Gut Health

From the day that you were conceived, you encountered external and internal influences that impact not only hormones but also overall health. These include:

- Stress
- Exotoxins
- Maternal endotoxins such as unhealthy diet and inadequate nutrition

- Genetic load
- Dietary factors
- Hygiene

As you age, not only do you deal with these factors, but stressors increase due to jobs, family, and social factors. Your body may start to work overtime and become chronically stressed or inflamed. This stress often manifests itself in gut and digestive ailments.

The gastrointestinal tract can benefit from the following:

- Pancreatic enzymes
- Hydrochloric acid (betaine hydrochloride)
- L-glutamine, an amino acid that is anti-inflammatory and helps repair the intestinal lining
- Aloe vera, helps form mucus
- High fiber diet, smoothes and regulates digestion
- Probiotics, supports a healthy microbiome
- Prebiotics, feeds the healthy, probiotic bacteria

Cushing's Syndrome and Hypercortisolism

Hypercortisolism precedes Cushing's Syndrome, and both can result in adrenal fatigue, as the adrenal gland works too hard and overproduces cortisol. If you suffer from either one of these conditions, consult with your doctor to see if you can discontinue medications that increase cortisol (like steroids). Switch to a whole foods, anti-inflammatory diet.

In terms of specific dietary changes, emphasize foods with calcium, potassium, and magnesium. These electrolytes are natural muscle relaxers and can help reduce symptoms associated with high cortisol levels – like insomnia. Eat more protein, as these amino acids help regulate neurotransmitter function. Foods high in B vitamins, like leafy green vegetables, help support brain function. Healthy fats and omega-3 fatty acids (found in cold-water fish) reduce inflammation and act as mood stabilizers. Eliminate salty foods to decrease sodium levels.

Addison's Disease, Hypocortisolism, and Adrenal Dysfunction/Fatigue

Whether you suffer from primary or secondary adrenal insufficiency, diet can play a major role in reducing or eliminating the symptoms. In general, you avoid alcohol, excessive caffeine consumption, simple sugars, packaged and processed foods, and hydrogenated and refined vegetable oils. Instead, consume healthy

fats, organic vegetables, wild-caught fish, high-quality animal products, sea vegetables, high-fiber foods, and probiotic-rich foods. Some beneficial supplements include ashwagandha, holy basil, omega-3 fatty acids, licorice root, magnesium, and B-vitamin complex.

Fibrocystic Breasts

Avoid processed foods, alcohol, simple sugars, dairy, additives, chemicals, and foods high in salt. Foods high in antioxidants, like blueberries and broccoli, can help prevent malignant growths in the breasts. Foods high in beta-carotene, which tend to be orange – like carrots and squash –, reduce the lumps associated with fibrocystic breasts. Omega-3 fatty acids, found in wild-caught, cold-water fish, reduce inflammation.

Endometriosis

An anti-inflammatory diet can significantly improve endometriosis. In general, eliminate dairy and gluten and monitor whether symptoms improve. Avoid hormone-containing meats to prevent xenoestrogen exposure. Avoid alcohol, as it affects how estrogen is metabolized. Whenever possible, choose organic produce to reduce toxin exposure. With proper care and dietary changes, you can remain fertile and generally healthy.

Infertility

Infertility is a loud and clear signal that there is significant hormonal imbalance that is wreaking havoc on the body. Along with choosing organic, fresh, whole foods, men and women should increase B vitamin consumption. Regularly eat cold-water fish for omega-3, but be sure to avoid farm-raised fish as they may contain antibiotics and toxins.

Understand the importance of high-quality, grass-fed, humanely-raised meats. It is also beneficial to increase fiber intake, which can help balance blood sugar, balance hormones, and reduce fertility issues. Be sure to drink contaminant-free, filtered water and avoid fruit juices and other refined sugars. You may want to try CoQ10, which has been shown to increase egg and sperm health.

Hormonal Migraines, Premenstrual Syndrome, and Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder

Because fluctuations in blood sugar levels can exacerbate hormonal migraines and PMS symptoms, it is vital to consume complex carbohydrates – like starchy vegetables – to stabilize blood sugar levels. Also focus on consuming foods high in fiber, B vitamins, easily-digestible protein, and omega-3 fats. In particular, B vitamins help reduce nervousness and stress. Herbs like feverfew and black cohosh may also be helpful.

Omega-3 fatty acid may lower prostaglandins, which are hormone-like chemicals that can cause the pain and inflammation associated with cramping and migraines. Finally, it is important to avoid foods high in caffeine, salt, sugar, and highly-processed foods. MSG can worsen headaches and should be avoided.

Low Estrogen, Low Progesterone, Perimenopause, and Menopause

Along with eating complex, fiber-rich carbohydrates instead of simple sugars, you can benefit from consuming more Vitamin E for increased estrogen and progesterone production. Foods rich in Vitamin C can boost progesterone levels. Zinc, found in red meat, pumpkin, and cashews, encourages the pituitary gland to release FSH, which triggers the release of progesterone.

Also be sure to get enough Vitamin B6 and sulfur foods such as cruciferous vegetables and eggs in their diets, as these help prevent estrogen dominance or the incorrect ratio of estrogen to progesterone. In addition, chasteberry (Vitex), licorice, and black cohosh can have an estrogen-like effect and can help balance hormone levels.

Pregnenolone, which is synthesized from cholesterol, is the precursor to progesterone, and stress hormones. In the face of chronic stress, more stress hormones and less progesterone is produced. Therefore, stress reduction will be very important to restore hormone balance.

Finally, a practice called seed rotation can support hormonal balance. To increase progesterone, sesame seeds and sunflower seeds should be consumed. To boost estrogen, consume flaxseed and pumpkin seeds.

Postpartum Depression

Estrogen and progesterone levels are very high during pregnancy and then plummet after birth. This, in combination with the myriad of stressors that accompany being a mother to a newborn, can trigger severe postpartum depression within a year following giving birth. The recommendations I just made

for low estrogen and low progesterone will also help women struggling with postpartum depression. In addition, Vitamin B12, folate, SAM-e, St. John's Wort, Valerian, and Vitamin D are all mood boosters.

Low Pregnenolone

Because pregnenolone is produced from cholesterol, you need to consume enough healthy fats, like coconut oil, eggs, and olive oil. Ashwagandha can increase pregnenolone and shield the body from the effects of stress. Remember that people who are deficient in pregnenolone, the “mother” hormone, are likely also deficient in other hormones, like progesterone.

High Androgens, Hypergonadism, and Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome

You may remember that hypergonadism results from over-activity of the sex-hormone producing organs. This can result in high testosterone in men and high estrogen levels in women. At least among men, the goal always seems to be to increase testosterone levels, but high androgens, or male sex hormones, can increase cancer risk in men and women. It also increases susceptibility for polycystic ovarian syndrome in women. Excessive insulin in the blood can trigger the production of androgens.

To reduce insulin levels, you should focus on lowering carbohydrate intake – especially simple sugars. Furthermore, reducing the consumption of animal foods can lower androgen levels, as vegetarians tend to have lower levels of male hormones than meat-eaters. Increased intake of plant-based foods further lowers these levels. Flax seeds, which contain phytoestrogen, can help to balance hormone levels.

Low Testosterone and Hypogonadism

On the opposite end of the spectrum is low testosterone and hypogonadism. While testosterone levels naturally decrease with age, many foods help to slow the decline. In particular, foods rich in vitamin D and zinc are crucial. Fatty fish and organ meat (like liver) are rich in vitamin D, and seaweed and ground beef contain zinc. Legumes are also a good option.

Hyperthyroidism and Graves' Disease

The most common type of hyperthyroidism – or overactive thyroid – is Graves' disease, which is an autoimmune disease in which the body produces an antibody that causes the thyroid gland to produce and secrete too much thyroid hormone.

Other causes of hyperthyroidism include inflammation, infection, excessive iodine consumption, and a tumour or lump.

Eat plenty of green vegetables and even homemade juices to support the immune system and provide the thyroid with the nutrients it needs to function properly. Herbs such as basil, rosemary, and oregano can have an anti-inflammatory effect. Homemade bone broth supports digestive function, which may help prevent or manage an autoimmune disease like Grave's. Be sure to avoid processed foods, gluten, simple sugars, and dairy as much as possible as these can be inflammatory.

Cystic Acne

Remember that cystic acne is a result of bacteria that burrows into the skin. It is painful and can spread rapidly. Most troubling, it can linger for months and even years and leave scars. The good news is that dietary changes can significantly reduce cystic acne. In particular, foods that support the liver, like cruciferous vegetables and dandelion root tea are helpful. Apple cider vinegar helps to fight bacteria and balance pH levels – or the level of acidity in the body. Avoid high-sugar foods, dairy, gluten, and highly processed foods.

Diabetes/Prediabetes

Even if you have not been diagnosed with diabetes or prediabetes, but have significant visceral (belly) fat, fatigue, and other signs of metabolic disorder, you should implement dietary and lifestyle changes immediately to avoid diabetes.

These changes can also help a diabetic manage their blood sugar levels.

In general, you don't need to completely cut carbs out of the diet, but you do need to replace simple sugars (like candy) with complex carbs (like fibre-rich veggies). Foods rich in Vitamin B also prevent blood sugar spikes. Healthy fats can help shield the body from the damaging effects of sugar. So when you do consume sugar, make sure you do so in conjunction with healthy fats. That is to say that low-fat or no-fat yogurt is a no-no.

Low-grade, chronic inflammation often underlies obesity and metabolic disorder, so to combat this, ginseng, turmeric, fenugreek, astragalus, and tryptophan are helpful.

SUMMARY OF FOODS FOR COMMON ISSUES

High Cortisol Levels

- Emphasize eating unprocessed foods,
- Eat a variety of fruits and veggies high in antioxidants.
- Consume omega-3 fatty acids from fish like salmon, sardines, or mackerel.
- Include foods high in vitamin C such as leafy greens or citrus fruits.
- Eat probiotic foods, fresh herbs and spices, and healthy fats like coconut oil.
- Try adaptogen herbs like ashwagandha, ginseng, rhodiola, and medicinal mushrooms.
- Include B vitamin-rich foods like eggs, poultry, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and nutritional yeast.

Low Estrogen Levels

- Eat more phytoestrogens, which are found in fermented soy products
- Flax seeds
- Superfoods like maca powder, black cohosh, vitex, or chasteberry
- Ginseng and valerian root
- Magnesium-rich foods, like leafy greens or cocoa
- Healthy fats

High Estrogen Levels

- Olive or coconut oil
- Avocado
- Turmeric
- Seaweeds and other greens
- Resveratrol found in fruits like grapes
- Green tea
- Probiotic foods such as fermented foods

Hypothyroidism

- Anti-inflammatory foods like fresh veggies and fruits
- Omega-3 foods
- Probiotic foods
- Healthy fats
- Collagen protein
- Bone broth
- Grass-fed meats
- Selenium-rich foods like oysters, Brazil nuts, and sunflower seeds



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