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## Are hormone imbalances affecting your ability to lose weight?

### Internal Barriers to Weight Loss – Part 1

Did you know that hormonal imbalances can cause us to gain weight? Most people know that if their thyroid gland isn't making hormones correctly they can start to pile on the kilos, but some other lesser known hormones can do this as well such as our stress hormone cortisol. Another interesting aspect of hormonal problems causing weight gain is that they often target specific areas of our body.

If you're trying to lose weight but finding yourself struggling despite doing all the right things, it might be time to investigate if your hormones are sabotaging your efforts. Below I will cover some of the key hormones that can be involved, how to identify if they're out of balance and what to do about it.

In the next newsletter I will cover some of the other issues that can affect your ability to lose weight that aren't because of hormones.

#### **Stress**

When we are stressed our adrenal glands produce more of the hormone cortisol. This was originally designed as a reaction to help us run away from the hungry tiger, but now when the cortisol is being produced from our work, family and financial stress it's so as helpful. Excess levels of cortisol can cause fluid retention, bloating and weight gain around the neck, trunk and abdomen. Women with higher levels of this hormone have been shown to have larger waists than those women with normal cortisol levels.

If stress is severe or prolonged, it can cause chronic elevation of the hormones cortisol and adrenaline and this can result in weight gain, most likely due to our body thinking we need to stock up on nutrients to deal with famine or heal potential injuries. Some people may get certain food cravings in times of stress, and this can impede weight loss, especially if you are craving sugary or fatty foods.



Stress can be assessed not only by how you feel and the stressful events that you have been through, but also by testing the function of your adrenal hormones by a saliva test. Our cortisol levels should rise moderately in the morning, then gradually reduce throughout the day. I often find that cortisol is too low in the morning (which causes fatigue), then too high in the afternoon (causing cravings) and still high at night (causing sleep problems).

If you are experiencing high levels of stress then a treatment program combining herbal medicine and high quality nutritional supplements designed to balance the adrenal glands and help improve your ability to cope with stress will help to balance the cortisol levels and also reduce food cravings, therefore improving weight loss. This works best when combined when targeted to the results of a cortisol test, as the herbs can be given at the times we know you need to be balanced.

### Thyroid Disorders

Thyroid imbalance can strongly affect metabolism and make it difficult to lose weight. Approximately 6-10% of women have hypothyroidism. However, the prevalence increases with age and up to 25% of women aged 65 years or older may be affected. Men are also affected, but less frequently. People with an underactive thyroid may experience weight gain, fluid retention, bloating. An overactive thyroid usually causes weight loss, oily skin and an increase in irritability. In some cases the symptoms can be the opposite. The different symptoms are covered in the table below.

<b>Symptoms of over- and underactive thyroid.</b>	
<b>Hyperthyroidism</b>	<b>Hypothyroidism</b>
Accelerated heart rate or palpitations	Slow heart rate
Muscle weakness or trembling	Fatigued and aching muscles
Unexplained weight loss	Unexplained weight gain
Sensitivity to heat	Intolerance to cold temperatures
Sweating	Dry, coarse skin

Irritability	Problems with concentration
Nervousness, agitation and anxiety	Depressed mood
Sleeping difficulties	Fatigue and low energy levels
Diarrhoea	Constipation
Changes in menstruation; scantier flow	Puffy face
Increase cycle length	Hair loss
Eyelid retraction and lid lag	Goitre (enlarged thyroid gland)

Thyroid imbalance is very common in post-menopausal women and often goes unnoticed. A blood test by your doctor can assess your thyroid levels, but the range of what is considered normal thyroid hormone levels is very broad and so all too often people are told their thyroid is normal, yet they are showing signs of a struggling thyroid and metabolism. Research has shown that even a small increase in TSH, the main thyroid hormone tested in blood tests, can lead to weight gain. By combining information from your blood test results with your symptoms, a basal body temperature chart and/or an iodine test we can help to put the picture together of whether your thyroid is working as it should.

If you have an imbalance in your thyroid function, consult a naturopath for a treatment plan to correct its functioning and bring your metabolism back on track.

### Insulin resistance

Insulin resistance, also known as Syndrome X is a metabolic disorder which affects insulin and blood sugar level metabolism. In individuals with insulin resistance your body cells' insulin receptors have become resistant, which leads to high levels of circulating insulin. If left unmanaged, this syndrome can develop into diabetes.

People with insulin resistance tend to carry weight around the abdomen (visceral fat).

Insulin is tested via blood. You have to ask your doctor for this test, as it isn't performed in routine check ups. If your insulin level is 10 or greater this is suggestive of insulin resistance.

Insulin resistance makes it very difficult for you to lose weight successfully. The best way to tackle insulin resistance is a combination of exercise, diet modification and nutritional supplementation.

### Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)

PCOS is a very common condition in women and presents with several symptoms such as excess hair growth (hirsutism), acne, irregular periods, and difficulty losing weight. This condition is usually caused by a combination of insulin resistance, excess androgens and low levels of progesterone.

Naturopathic treatment can help to treat PCOS by regulating hormone levels and treating insulin resistance. Once the insulin resistance and hormonal levels are improved, weight loss can occur more easily.

### Oestrogen Dominance

High levels of the hormone oestrogen can cause several health complaints such as endometriosis, breast tenderness, pre-menstrual syndrome and period pain, however it can also affect your weight. Too much oestrogen encourages fat and cellulite to build up around the hips, thighs and buttocks.

In women with oestrogen dominance, herbs and nutrients that boost progesterone and support liver function can help fat loss to occur more effectively from areas that you want, instead of the face and breast area (which women usually don't want to lose).

Hormones can be tested via blood or saliva. Saliva hormone testing is able to identify imbalances more easily than blood, however is more expensive than blood tests which can sometimes be covered by Medicare when ordered by a doctor. Hormone testing can help identify PCOS, Oestrogen dominance and testosterone deficiency in males.

If you feel like you have one or more of the above issues that is affecting your ability to lose weight, make an appointment to see how we can help you. We will go through your case history and can suggest which factors may be relevant for you, and can discuss your testing options with you. Once we have identified what is happening we can create a treatment plan to naturally and safely balance your hormones.

Call us on **0415 517 445** or book online on [www.nnhealth.com.au](http://www.nnhealth.com.au)

We look forward to seeing you soon,

Paula