

YOU'RE NOT BROKEN: Empowering Women To Rethink Hormonal Imbalance



So, you're saying stress could be giving me insomnia and 'muffin top'?" Liz sighed. Her gaze wandered out the office window to the leaves that were beginning to turn. "I just want to feel like myself again. Can you fix me?"

I recognized her frustration. Years of working with patients, often high-achieving individuals living in overdrive, told me she wasn't broken—and she wasn't alone.

As women, so many of us experience things like unexplained weight gain or fatigue, lackluster libido, and hair-trigger emotions, and we question ourselves.

We think we're making something out of nothing, or that we're imagining things.

Well-meaning friends tell us it's normal, spouses assure us we're crazy, and mothers say "it runs in the family."

The magic question; what can be done? A lot!

But first, we must consider what we're dealing with. Experience told me that Liz was struggling with hormonal disarray. Specifically, Neuro-endocrine Dysregulation (NEDR); when our bodies are so burdened from operating in overdrive that crucial hormones (cortisol, progesterone, thyroid and others) become depleted.

About a week later, on a crisp fall day, Liz and I met again and the puzzle pieces began falling into place. My review of her exam and labs confirmed the presence of NEDR. Liz's low energy, weight gain, and sleep troubles were likely the result. She was relieved to finally have a reason for how she'd been feeling. "I *knew* something wasn't right!" I smiled, knowing that it takes a lot of courage for women to listen to our instincts. I also knew that these findings were a positive sign that we could turn things around.

Hormone imbalance is surprisingly widespread. According to research, one in eight women suffers from thyroid dysfunction^[i], and some sources estimate that up to 50% of women over 35 struggle with estrogen dominance, including low progesterone.^[ii] My experience has shown that if we identify the early signs of imbalance, we are able to engage our hormones to work with us, not against us.

There are a few things we need to take into consideration to do this:

First, just like every other mammal, our hormones are made entirely **INSIDE** our bodies. This means our body already knows how to produce every hormone we need, and if we aren't making sufficient hormones, something must be interfering with the process. This is the part of the puzzle I work with patients to piece together.

Second, the key day-to-day culprits that can disrupt hormone balance are:

- Insufficient nutrients
- Excessive exercise
- Overwork
- Inadequate rest and sunlight
- Environmental toxins

The last key thing to understand is that our brain directs everything hormonal. When our brain is in overdrive or our body is taxed, our brain directs a surge of cortisol to be delivered to all of our organs to help us adapt. While this is absolutely necessary in the moment, it is also very damaging when it goes on for too long. Until the brain lets go of the reins a bit, our body will keep pumping out cortisol while also suppressing thyroid and progesterone, until we become deficient of key micro-minerals—causing us to also look and feel depleted.

The advantage of our hormones being made on-site, under the direction of our brain, is that it gives us opportunity to rebuild them ourselves. With this in mind, I developed a program of care specifically for Liz, encompassing lifestyle and nutritional phases to help her body restore itself.

Over the next few months, Liz and I kept in touch between appointments. I was there along the way to make course-corrections, and help her navigate each stage smoothly. We acknowledged milestones, like when she fit into the sleek velvet holiday dress she bought a few years back, or the first time she slept through the night *for a whole week*.

When Liz and I met again in early December, her blood pressure had dropped by 12 points. Her skin was luminous and she had lost 28 pounds. “Look, no muffin top! My hair’s even growing in thicker. I’m just glad it’s growing on my head and not on my lip!” She laughed; her sense of humor seemed healthier too.

Liz’s success is not unique. Here are three things that can benefit any woman concerned about hormone imbalance:

1. Pay attention to the clues:

- Impaired energy: poor sleep, brain fog, memory loss
- Slow metabolism: weight gain, cold hands, hair loss
- Weak reproduction: irregular cycles, hot flashes/night sweats, diminished libido

2. Realize that you’re not broken. The signs that we think are bad are actually ways our body tells us to pay attention. It is not “normal aging” or just hereditary, and you aren’t crazy.

3. Trust your instincts. Seek out a qualified health-care professional who can assess you for nutritional and hormonal imbalances.

By the end of February, the tree outside the office window was heavy with snow, and Liz was planning for a holiday cruise. Feeling healthier than ever, her confidence showed in the way she carried herself; she wasn’t hiding anymore. She admitted to me that she actually enjoyed shopping for her flattering new swimsuit.

What ultimately made the difference for Liz? She trusted her instincts, and got the care she needed when she felt like her body was working against her. This certainly isn’t the end of her story. Liz and I will continue to check in to protect the gains she’s made, and adapt to her body’s changing needs.

Most importantly, with guidance Liz has learned that she can shift her hormones and metabolism through *her own* healthy habits—something she is more than pleased to share with friends when they inevitably ask what her “secret” is these days!

[i] <http://www.thyroid.org/media-main/about-hypothyroidism/>

[ii] <https://www.drlam.com/blog/estrogen-dominance-2/1704/>



Dr. Kimberly Higney helps women restore hormone health and metabolism through functional nutrition and lifestyle. She practices on the New Hampshire Seacoast. For more information visit www.cardeaseacoast.com