

A Woman's Guide to Understanding Her Hormones

by (ARA)

For any woman to fully understand her body, she needs to be aware of the impact that hormones can have on every phase of her development. The brain releases many different hormones which can cause internal and external changes to your body, mood and appearance, particularly during puberty, pregnancy and menopause. While each phase presents itself with unique side effects, there are some that are surprisingly common to all three. Here's a guide to understanding and coping with these times of change.

Puberty: During puberty a girl develops biologically, psychologically, socially and cognitively. Her brain releases hormones to stimulate ovarian production of estrogen and progesterone, which cause the body to mature and enable menstruation and pregnancy. During her period, hormones and prostaglandins (hormone-like substances) may cause menstrual cramps, water retention, food cravings and irritability. There are simple ways to alleviate some of these symptoms. For cramping, try over-the-counter pain medications, like ibuprofen or acetaminophen. Eat a balanced diet with whole grains and vitamin B6 to reduce irritability and cravings, and avoid caffeine and salty foods to reduce water retention. Understandably, puberty is a challenging time, so sites like CoolNurse.com and the podcast, STR8 UP-Health Talk for Teens (available on iTunes) are great resources to ease the transition.

Pregnancy: Hormones change dramatically during pregnancy. The hormone HCG (Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin) stimulates the ovaries to produce higher levels of estrogen and progesterone to prepare the womb for pregnancy. The body also releases more of the hormone prolactin to enable lactation. Unfortunately, all these hormones also contribute to morning sickness, weight gain, increased appetite and exhaustion. Eating frequent, but smaller, sensible meals can alleviate morning sickness and satisfy an increased appetite. Low impact exercises, like walking or yoga, help to maintain a healthy body weight, increase energy levels and reduce morning sickness. The site PregnancyToday.com offers a week-by-week pregnancy guide as well as message boards for support networks.

Menopause: A woman typically begins menopause when she's between 45 and 55. During this time, the ovaries produce dramatically less estrogen and eventually menstruation stops. Estrogen is so vital to a woman's body that its results in many unwanted side effects, such as hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness and increased risk of osteoporosis. For some, fresh air and cold liquids will alleviate hot flashes, and increased calcium intake and exercise can combat osteoporosis. For others, the side effects of menopause are more significant and may call for hormone replacement therapy (HRT). While puberty, pregnancy, and menopause have very unique effects on a woman's body, they also share a few common side effects since they are all characterized by fluctuating hormones:

Vaginal Yeast Infections: A yeast infection is marked by an overgrowth of yeast in the vagina, accompanied by itching, burning, and a thick, white curdy vaginal discharge. Caused by a pH imbalance of the vagina and fluctuating hormones, yeast infections are very common (75 percent of women are affected) and can be treated over-the-counter. Nature's Cure, for example, makes 1-Day and 3-Day Yeast Infection Convenience Packs. Both come with a vaginal treatment, to kill overgrown yeast and relieve discomfort, and all-natural homeopathic tablets to work with the body to fight yeast at its source. Nature's Cure also created Yeast Control Capsules to help maintain an internal environment that discourages yeast proliferation, even during life stages of hormonal chaos!

Mood Swings: Ever notice that teens, expectant mothers and menopausal women all seem to have mood swings? Hormone surges can wreak havoc on one's mood, causing irritability or sudden emotional shifts. Regular exercise helps by stimulating production of beta-endorphins, a hormone that controls stress and improves mood. It's also important to get plenty of rest, as fatigue can exacerbate sadness and irritability.

Acne: Acne refers to pimples, whiteheads, and blackheads, and occurs when sebaceous glands overproduce sebum (oil) and get clogged, inflamed and infected by bacteria. Most people associate acne with teenagers, but hormonal changes can cause an overproduction of sebum at any age, so it's a common side effect for women during puberty, pregnancy, and menopause. Although acne may be embarrassing or painful, it usually clears up with a healthy diet, good hygiene, and an over-the-counter remedy that addresses the internal cause of acne, like Nature's Cure Two-Part Acne Treatment. The cream kills acne-causing bacteria and the tablets naturally balance the body from inside to prevent future breakouts. In the end, our bodies produce dozens of hormones that control virtually everything we do. So the next time you feel "hormonal," just remember -- while you can't turn off your hormones, you can alleviate some of their unwanted side effects.

