

Hormones play significant role

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Women continually go through feelings of happiness to sadness.

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It is important to understand how hormones work. Progesterone, which is produced by the ovaries and the adrenal glands after ovulation, maintains

healthy cell growth in the uterus. Estrogen is created by the ovaries, the adrenal glands and fat cells and prepares the uterus to accept a fertilized egg each month. Testosterone is made by the ovaries and the adrenal glands and regulates sex drive. The thyroid hormone controls metabolism. There is an impact with hormones at different stages of your life.

In your 20s and 30s, peak fertility years, your menstrual cycle should be pretty regular. "Hormone levels go through a dramatic changes during during your menstrual cycle," said Mary Jane Minkin, a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Yale University School of Medicine. A surge in estradiol (a form of estrogen) about 10 days after the onset of your period, right around ovulation, induces a happy mood, while a boost in progesterone in the second half of your cycle can make you irritable.

What may happen is a dip in sex drive if you use a hormonal contraceptive, such as birth control pills or vaginal ring. "These contain synthetic estrogen, which blocks testosterone," said Bat Sheva Marcus, the clinical director of the Medical Center for Female Sexuality in New York. The good news is there is a new contraceptive pill containing natural hormones to help keep your libido intact. This however is still under review by the Food and Drug Administration.

As you enter your 30s, you may experience a drop in fertility. If you are under 35 and trying to conceive — if it doesn't happen within a 12-month period — you may need to consult with a fertility specialist. If you are over 35, give yourself six months before consulting a fertility specialist.

Studies have shown that eating cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli and cauliflower, can help keep estrogen and progesterone levels at the proper ratio, said Eva Cwynar, an endocrinologist in Beverly Hills. Yams and flaxseed oil also may be beneficial. Minkin suggests taking 1,200 milligrams of calcium per day.

In your 40s, you should still have regular periods, but your ovaries have begun to produce less estrogen and less progesterone. This is the stage where you are entering perimenopause, a precursor to menopause that can last up to five years. This is the time frame your body starts to experience hot flashes, a lag in sex drive and vaginal dryness.

You may experience weight gain. "Thyroid hormones are the key determinants of your metabolism," said Kent Holtorf, an endocrinologist in Los Angeles. Many women produce less of this hormone with age, which causes the pounds to creep on. A simple blood test can determine any deficiencies, and taking thyroid hormones may help normalize your weight.

You may experience sleep problems as the progesterone dip may cause insomnia.

Experts suggest eating soy foods and alleviating hot flashes by taking Vitamin E.

For those of us in our 50s and beyond, progesterone production has decreased considerably, and most of our estrogen comes from adrenal glands and fat tissue, not ovaries.

On average, by age 51, a woman has reached menopause. Testosterone levels are erratic, producing more hot flashes and causing sex drive to zig-zag.

You may experience dry skin and possibly brittle hair and nails. This a a great excuse to buy richer creams and conditioners. When your hormone levels drop, it may result in a minor memory problem and cognitive dysfunction.

Eat foods like salmon, walnuts and peanuts. They are rich in essential fatty acids and can safely increase testosterone levels and may improve sex drive.

You may feel better by being proactive. You may consider hormone replacement therapy. However, a study published in 2002 by the Women's Health Initiative suggests that hormone replacement therapy may be related to an increased risk of breast cancer, heart disease and stroke. You should consult with your physician to determine which alternative may be best for you.

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