

The Essential Guide to Bio-Identical Hormone Therapy



Restoring natural hormone balance

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Question #1

What are Bio-Identical Hormones?

Bio-Identical Hormones — Hormones that are identical atom for atom in molecular structure to the hormones women/men make in their bodies. They're not found in this form in nature but are made, or synthesized, from a plant derived compound extracted from yams and soy. Bioidentical estrogens are estradiol, estrone, and estriol. (Estradiol is the form of estrogen that decreases at menopause.) Bioidentical progesterone is simply progesterone. It's micronized (finely ground) in the laboratory for better absorption in the body. (See Glossary for a complete definition and explanation of each hormone.)

Bioidentical hormone replacement therapy (BHRT) is often called “natural hormone therapy” because **Bio-Identical Hormones** act in the body just like the hormones we produce. Technically, the body can't distinguish bioidentical hormones from the ones your ovaries/testicles or body produces. The molecular structure is so similar, on a blood test, your total estradiol reflects the bioidentical estradiol you've taken as well as the estradiol your body makes.



 Harvard Health Publications, “Trusted Advice for a Healthier Life”, Dec. 4, 2015

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Question #2

What are the side effects associated with Bio-identical Hormones?

The adverse effects that may occur depend upon which hormone levels remain unbalanced. While seeking optimal hormone balance with bio-identical hormone therapy, you may temporarily experience mild side effects, including but not limited to:

- Headaches
- Irritability
- Mood swings
- Increased acne
- Difficulty sleeping
- Breast tenderness

Remember, you may already be experiencing any one of these symptoms, which is why you're seeking treatment. Studies show that once you reach your optimal hormone balance you will see a drastic reduction or complete absence of any side effects.



 Dr Jennifer Landa, M.D., Chief Medical Officer of Body Logic.

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Question #3

What are synthetic hormones?

Let's take estrogen as an example. Organically foreign, synthetic estrogens are derived from pregnant mare's urine. Yes, you read correctly, pregnant mare's urine. More than 30 years ago, prior to any serious interest in women's health, pharmaceutical companies made the decision to source estrogen from an animal substitute.

This synthetic version bears little resemblance to any hormones our bodies naturally produces. Thus being synthetic, the formula can receive US Patent Protection for the pharmaceutical company. As stated in our blog article titled Natural-vs-Synthetic, "The reason they alleviate some of the symptoms is because our cells misread certain portions of the molecular structure of these substances." For example, in the 1950's Estrogen was derived from pregnant horse urine. Since then, little has changed, it still remains the primary source of estrogen produced by most pharmaceutical companies. These synthetic substitutes are still recommended for the treatment of menopausal symptoms in women by some medical providers.

Prior to any serious initiative involving women's health, it has been noted that these drugs were not used very extensively in the early stages. As a result, little was learned about side-effects arising from the use of synthetic estrogen. Simply put, because it is derived from horses it is not the same as human estrogen. It may contain estriol, estrone and estradiol, which is found in the human estrogen molecule, but it also contains equilin, an additional estrogen molecule that is specific to the horse. This alone is a strong argument for a more natural alternative.

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Question #4

What should one consider when doing Hormone Replacement Therapy?

Hormone replacement is a complex matter, and should only be done by medical facilities that specialize in hormone replacement therapy programs. Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy (BHRT) is a treatment program customized to alleviate symptoms and improve your overall well-being. Following a one-on-one consultation, you will meet with a provider to review your medical history in detail. With any BHRT program it is crucial that regular monitoring and blood tests be performed to ensure an accurate dosage is prescribed. It is important to remember that how your bioidentical hormones are delivered plays a major role in the success of your treatment.

Oral supplementation is processed through your liver prior to entering your bloodstream and becomes almost ineffective due to it having already been metabolized. Topical creams, once popular, are fat soluble and may build up in your fatty tissue. The result over time may lead to an imbalance of hormones in your system. Considered a superior delivery option, [hormone pellets](#) are safe and effective, and are available to your body 24 hours a day. [Hormone pellets](#) can be customized to your needs and are secreted in small amounts and absorbed by your body as needed.



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 Dr. J. Mercola, (2013). Estrogen Could Have Prevented Almost 50,00 Deaths, Sifferlin, Alexandra (July 2013). Hormone-Replacement Therapy, Time Magazine



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Question #5

Why should I use Bioidentical Hormone Replacement?

There is a theory called, “The Hayflick Limit”, which is the number of times a normal cell population will divide until the cell division stops leading to cellular death or cell mutation. In laymen’s terms, it’s called aging. In 1917, one hundred years ago, the average lifespan for a man was 48 years of age and a woman’s 54. The approximated life span for an adult in 2017 is approximately 79 years of age. On average we have added another 28 to 30 years to our life span, give or take a few years. These years have been added in a relatively short period of time, plus our life styles have changed dramatically with an increase in stress, poorer nutrition, and lack of daily activity. The soft tissue glands which create our hormones are being required to produce them longer, while our bodies are being compromised by outside influences. This is a combination that results in a declining range of hormones, and leads to a wide array of negative symptoms.

Atom for atom, [Bioidentical Hormone Replacement](#) can replace the hormones that have declined as our bodies age. They are not just safe, but they also have a positive impact on our quality of life, general health, and various disease states like osteoporosis and prostate cancer.



 Hayflick L. (1961). The serial cultivation of human diploid cell strains. *Experimental Cell Research* pg. 585-621

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Question #6

Why do women need hormones Pre-Menopause/Perimenopause and Menopause?

Women utilize three specific hormones, [estrogen](#), progesterone, and testosterone. Regardless of your actual age if these hormones are unbalanced you may suffer an array of negative symptoms including but not limited to; night sweats, sleep problems, vaginal dryness, irritability, and fatigue. Menopause is considered normal between the ages of 40-55 with 51 being the average.

Perimenopause is a fairly new term and includes Pre-menopause because it is defined as the 5-10 years surrounding menopause. It includes a broad range of symptoms which are specific to each individual and is a result of hormone fluctuation as we move closer to Menopause. Perimenopause can last up to 10 years before a woman moves fully into Menopause, which means her symptoms may start as early as age 40. Regardless of where we are in life's natural cycle, women with balanced hormones integrated with proper nutrition and fitness can have a higher quality of life as they age.



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Pick M. OB/GYN NP, Perimenopause.



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Question #7

Why do men need testosterone replacement?

While women enter Menopause with sometimes dramatic symptoms, men tend to “age gracefully”, and over a period of many years enter a sort of male menopause termed as “andropause”. This term is used to describe the decreasing testosterone levels related to age. Testosterone levels usually decline about 1 percent a year after the age of 30. [Testosterone](#) is the hormone that is responsible for maintaining mental focus, energy, metabolism, muscle mass, fat levels and sex drive. With Bioidentical Hormone Therapy, men can restore their levels to increase their vitality and reduce the signs and symptoms of andropause.



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Question #8


When should I consider Bioidentical Hormone therapy?

For men testosterone levels are at their highest in their late teens, so it is true when they say a man hits his peak before age 20. But in reality the decline is so slow and is not really measurable until the age of 30. Because of hormone imbalance, around the age of 40 men usually experience changes in their sex drive, performance, and energy.

For women, once they reach their 30s, hormone levels typically start to decline and become unbalanced. Usually, but not the case for every woman, testosterone levels decline first, followed by progesterone and estrogen. It has been reported that as high as 80 percent of women over 30 experience symptoms ranging from sleeplessness to night sweats. As a woman reaches menopause estrogen levels can rapidly decline sometimes as much as 90 percent. The loss of estrogen is the leading cause for some of the more uncomfortable symptoms women experience during menopause.

Because each person's symptomatic experiences are so different, once you start to experience symptoms you should consider Bioidentical Hormone therapy as soon as a possible. The reality is that the symptoms will not be going away, in fact there is a high probability they will only intensify.



 Morris, Susan. September 30, 2014. All About the Male Sex Drive, Medically Reviewed by Krucik G. MD, MBA. www.healthline.com

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Question #9

Are Bioidentical Hormones FDA approved?

Bioidentical hormones are biologically the same chemical structure as what your body produces naturally and cannot be patented. So the answer is no, Bioidentical hormones are not FDA approved. The reason many drugs are granted FDA approval, is because of a pharmaceutical company's investment in making a chemically unique drug that is tested via animal and human trials. These drugs usually involve a specific chemical characteristic, a specific delivery system, a unique manufacturing process, or specific fixed dose. As a result, the product can be regulated and from a monetary perspective and the pharmaceutical company manufacturing it, is protected.

On the flip side Bioidentical hormones are derived from a natural plant source, soy and yams, where each individual component is approved by the FDA. Bioidentical hormone treatment is individually tailored by composition and dosage. There is no basis for granting approval and monetary protection to any specific drug manufacturer. As previously mentioned, while the individually tailored Bioidentical hormone dose is not FDA approved, the FDA, through the Drug Quality and Security Act has oversight on production and procedure standards.



 Quality, Drug "Security Act." Public law 113-54 (2013)

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Question #10

How long until I see results using Bioidentical Hormones?

With the pellet system, hormones start to enter into your system within 34 to 72 hours after insertion. While it varies with each individual, symptoms may start to subside within 3-4 weeks and you may experience an increase in energy levels and a stabilization of sleep patterns. It usually takes 3-6 months to see optimum results. The key to success is for the provider to rigorously monitor levels until symptoms subside and an ideal dosage is established. Also, there is no substitute for incorporating additional healthy lifestyle modifications. The medical provider should counsel each patient regarding healthy lifestyle alternatives.



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Question #11

What is the difference between HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) vs. BHRT (Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy)?

BHRT Hormones are biologically identical to human hormones while, HRT hormones are derived from pregnant horses' urine.

BHRT dosage can be customized by dosage and drug composition, HRT hormones are fixed dosages and drug composition.

BHRT, regular monitoring insures dosage is ideal, while HRT is a set prescription and constant monitoring is typically not part of the treatment.

BHRT has several recent medically sound studies and published articles to support its probable prevention of certain diseases, while there is evidence that conventional HRT actually causes disease.

BHRT is “sometimes” covered by insurance plans, HRT is “usually” covered by insurance.

BHRT needs a prescription, so does HRT.

BHRT (pellet form) is dosed approximately every 3 months based on symptom monitoring and laboratory results, while conventional HRT is usually dosed daily by a single prescription and very little if any follow up monitoring.



Koshland, Peter, Pharm.D February 24, 2009, Traditional Hormone Replacement Therapy vs. Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy, The Compounder's Forum

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Question #12

Is Natural Hormone Replacement safe for menopausal women?

“The North American Menopause Society, the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, and The Endocrine Society take the position that most healthy, recently menopausal women can use hormone therapy for relief of their symptoms of hot flashes and vaginal dryness if they so choose. These medical organizations also agree that women should know the facts about hormone therapy.”



After carefully studying the complications and side effects of hormone replacement therapy, it has been concluded among leading medical organizations that hormone therapy is the most effective treatment for menopausal symptoms. Hot flashes generally are treated with a higher dose of estrogen but women who still have a uterus will need to take progesterone as well. With BHRT, the dose and combination treatment can be tailored to fit the individual's need and optimize health benefits without increasing the risk of complications.

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www.menopause.org



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Question #13

Will Bioidentical Hormone Replacement interfere with my currently prescribed medications?

There are very few drugs known to interact with Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy. While it's a short list, it is extremely important to disclose any and all medication you are currently taking to your clinician. Also, any changes in your current medications should be reported immediately.

Certain drugs can increase the breakdown of hormones, reducing their activity. These include:

Barbiturates (anti-anxiety drugs, including amobarbital, butalbital, pentobarbital, phenobarbital and secobarbital)

Rifampicin (used to treat tuberculosis)

HIV protease inhibitors (e.g. amprenavir, nelfinavir, ritonavir)

Phenytoin and Carbamazepine (used to treat epilepsy). 1

NOTE:

Grapefruit juice contains natural chemicals that alter how the body processes certain medications. So too much, can cause your body to absorb higher levels of the drug /hormone than intended



1. Suzanne Elvidge BSc (hons), MSc - Updated: 15 Oct 2016 www.foodanddruginteractions.co.uk
2. www.menopause.org

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Question #14

Is Natural Hormone Replacement safe for menopausal women?

The main goal of BHRT is to restore optimal hormonal balance to the body and improve quality of life. Once this is achieved, symptoms may completely disappear or be greatly reduced.

BHRT is considered one of the most effective treatments at reducing hot flashes and night sweats. Symptoms are usually improved within four weeks of starting treatment and maximal benefit gained by three months. Studies show that at around 18 wks. the severity of hot flashes can be reduced by as much as 87%. 1

- *BHRT may also improve sleep and reduce stress.*
- *BHRT may decrease inflammation responsible for muscle aches and joint pain.*
- *BHRT can improve mood and also depressive symptoms.*
- *Studies have shown that BHRT significantly improves vaginal dryness and sexual function.*
- *BHRT may increase stamina, energy, and endurance. It has been shown to have a positive effect on healthy cholesterol levels, which may help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.*
- *BHRT is considered one of the most effective ways of increasing bone mineral density and also preventing osteoporotic fractures in women. 2*
- *BHRT may help reduce the risk of heart disease, endometrial cancer, breast cancer, and colorectal cancer.*
- *BHRT has a positive effect on collagen (skin elasticity), strength, muscle mass, and connective tissue.*
- *There is a possible reduction in the long-term risk of Alzheimer's disease and all-cause dementia.*

ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

www.patient.info "Hormone Replacement Therapy(including Benefits and Risks)" 1

ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

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Question #15

What is the Women's Health Initiative?

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) established the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) in 1991 to address the most common causes of death, disability and impaired quality of life in postmenopausal women. The Women's Health Initiative Studies (WHI) were designed to examine the effects of synthetic estrogen and synthetic progestin (E+P; Prempro) and estrogen alone (Premarin) in postmenopausal women. The trial was designed to last for 8.5 years but was stopped in 2002 at 5.2 years because of an increase in adverse side effects. The increase in adverse side effects from the synthetic hormones included but not limited to certain cancers and cardiovascular disease.



There were serious limitations within the study. First, it did not address the premenopausal condition, which can begin as early as late 30's. It also did not address menopausal women, which on average begins at age 51. The study focused on postmenopausal women with an average age of 68. This is a major flaw in the study design because, most of these women had been in hormonal decline or complete loss of hormones for 15 years or more, which already put them at risk for the negative side effects found in the study. If we take into consideration what recent studies are now showing us, many of these diseases' could have been prevented if BHRT had been administered earlier in life.



Landa, J. M.D., June 6, 2012 "Using bioidentical hormone therapy to find relief from menopause"
Women's Health

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Question #16

Why don't most doctors prescribe Bioidentical Hormones?

1. Traditional doctors do not have the time needed to properly help you achieve optimum hormone balance.
2. BHRT is a specialty, and most doctors do not have the expertise or the time to train to properly treat patients.
3. Conventional offices do not have the resources, including labs and technicians to meet the patient's needs.
4. Insurance may or may not cover BHRT, which may not work within traditional doctor's business model.
5. Traditional Doctors are trained on treating the symptoms of hormone imbalance, not the cause.



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Question #17

Do I need a prescription for Bioidentical Hormone Therapy?

YES.

The individual ingredients may or may not be restricted to prescription, but any compounding or formulating of a customized dosage for an individual is a function of a pharmacist's. Only by the request of a practitioner may a pharmacist legally fill it.



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Question #18

What are the different delivery methods for hormones?

- **Injections:** Hormones are inserted into the muscle using a needle. The hormones are delivered systemically through the body without making a first pass through the digestive system.
- **Oral Capsules:** Hormones in oral pill form are swallowed and pass through the digestive system and liver before hormones enter your bloodstream where they are delivered systemically to the body. Dosing is usually daily.
- **Pellets:** Hormones are placed sub dermally under the skin in fatty tissue allowing the body to gradually absorb hormones directly into the bloodstream as needed. Dosing is usually once every three months.
- **Sublingual Drops and Troches:** Hormones in sublingual drops and troches are dissolved in your mouth bypassing the digestive tract by absorption through the mucous membranes. There is a possibility of greater than 50% being swallowed due to normal saliva formation. 1
- **Transdermal Creams, Gels, and Ointments:** Hormones in transdermal creams, gels, and ointments are absorbed through the skin so they bypass the digestive system.
- **Transdermal Patches:** Hormones in patches are absorbed through the skin so they do not make a first pass through the digestive system. Patches are usually worn for several days on the buttocks/hip area or abdomen. Possible irritation to the skin due to the adhesive used in the patch.

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 1 International Journal of Pharmaceutical Compounding, 2000 Nov/Dec;4(6)