

# Dietary Tips

FOR FEMALE HEALTH

Diet can play a big part in balancing female hormones



## Balancing hormones naturally, by Amanda Moore (MSc. BSc (Hons))

Your first step is to ensure you have a healthy diet including all the right foods to minimise hormonal disruption and provide all the key nutrients to balance hormone production and function.

### 1. Ensure adequate intake of good fats

These days many things you read suggest that you should be cutting down on your fat intake. The fact is some fats are essential to our health and well-being, while others are harmful. The essential fatty acids are the omega 3 and 6 oils, linoleic and linolenic acid which cannot be manufactured by the body and are vital for optimal brain, nervous system, immune and cardiovascular system function as well as for hormone balance and the skin. In the diet these oils are supplied from seeds such as sesame, pumpkin, hemp, linseed (flax) and sunflower and their oils, and from oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, herring and sardines. Recent research has shown that in conditions such as endometriosis, pms, and polycystic ovarian syndrome, symptoms can be alleviated. This is largely because these

oils are used to make beneficial hormone-like substances called prostaglandins from these oils. They play a role in reducing inflammation, regulating the immune system and reducing blood stickiness, hence clotting.

The Department of Health recommends that we should double the average intake of essential fatty acids by eating oily fish two or three times a week (because of the recent scares over toxicity of fish you should concentrate on the smaller fish like mackerel, sardines and herring. Limit tuna and salmon).

Recommendation:

- Eat oily fish 2 to 3 times per week.
- Eat a tablespoon of mixed seeds each day.
- Add cold-pressed seed oils, such as hemp and flax seed.

### 2. Increase fibre from complex wholegrains.

All carbohydrates are broken down into glucose. The speed at which they are broken down has an influence on your energy, mood, hormone balance and blood sugar levels. Complex carbohydrates such as oats, brown rice, quinoa, millet, rye and whole wheat should be increased in your diet. They are a rich source of B vitamins which are vital to balance hormones and of chromium which is important to balance blood sugar and help you avoid cravings.

The fibre in these wholegrains and in oats particularly, also helps bind excess oestrogen, so carrying it out of the body and helping hormone balance.

Recommendation:

- Increase all wholegrains, in particular aim to have oats once a day in the form of porridge, raw oats, muesli or oat cakes.

## Summary

Increase:

Essential fats from fish and seeds.  
Fibre from complex whole grains.  
Phytoestrogens from pulses and linseeds.

Reduce:

Alcohol  
Sugar  
Processed foods and hydrogenated fat  
Coffee

- Avoid refined 'white' grains in the form of pasta, breads, cakes, processed cereals etc. These not only are devoid of nutrients but they also deplete the body of nutrients during their metabolism.

### 3. Maximize intake of antioxidants and increase fruit and vegetable intake.

Eat several antioxidant foods every day. Try to have at least 3 portions of fruit and 3 portions of vegetables/day. This will provide you with vital nutrients and fibre. The fibre helps remove the toxins that can affect hormone balance and mood and it assists the body in eliminating excess oestrogen. The antioxidants also protect against free radical damage so keeping the body in an anti-inflammatory state. This is particularly important for conditions such as endometriosis and PMS cramps where inflammation increases pain.

Vitamin A: dark green, leafy vegetables and yellow/orange/red fruit and vegetables.

Vitamin C: fruits, especially citrus and vegetables especially dark green.

Vitamin E: unrefined, cold-pressed vegetable, nut and seed oils (sunflower, corn, soybean, walnut), soybeans, dark green leafy vegetables, peas and asparagus, sweet potatoes and wholegrains (brown rice, whole wheat bread, porridge and oatmeal).



Zinc: seafood, lean meats, wholegrains and legumes.

For conditions such as PMS where magnesium is important, increase the intake are dark

green leafy vegetables like dark lettuce, spinach, cabbage, kale etc.

Recommendation:

a. Increase all fruits and vegetables, ideally 70% of your diet should consist of fruits and particularly of vegetables.

#### 4. Increase intake of phyto-oestrogens

Eat at least one phytoestrogen-rich food every day.

Examples of phytoestrogen-rich foods are: celery, alfalfa, liquorice, rhubarb, bean sprouts, seeds, especially linseed and sunflower, soya and soya based foods such as tofu, tempe and miso, citrus fruits, French beans, grains especially rye and legumes (peas, beans and pulses).

Of particular importance are the isoflavones genistein and daidzein found in soya products particularly.

In an oestrogen dominant situations, such as PMS in the perimenopause, breast problems, breast cancer and endometriosis, phytoestrogens help protect the body from the effects of excess oestrogen. In the menopausal phase when oestrogen levels are lower phytoestrogens exert a mild oestrogenic effect which can help manage symptoms.

Recommendation:

a. Eat one phytoestrogen-rich food a day, ideally choose from organic soya milk, tofu, beans, lentil or peas.

#### 5. Increase foods to support the liver.

Ensure diet is rich in cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower and kale, cabbage and B.sprouts) (Glucoronidation pathway (also requires iron, B vits, L-glutamine, aspartic acid)) and sulphur containing foods such as onions, garlic and eggs (sulphation pathway ( also requires zinc, selenium, B vitamins and folic acid)). Minimise alcohol intake. Drink at least 2 litres of water a day.

Recommendation:

Eat a portion of cruciferous vegetables each day

#### 6. Adopt a blood sugar balancing diet

Blood sugar fluctuations affect hormone balance, leave you feeling tired and irritable and strain the adrenal system. Eat complex carbohydrates, balance protein with carbohydrate and avoid all refined sugar and white flour products (see next section).

#### 7. Avoid hormone disrupting foods

Reduce saturated fat - Saturated fat from red meat is pro-inflammatory making many hormonal conditions worse, particularly when swelling and pain are involved. They also contribute to weight gain and stimulate oestrogen production.

Reduce or avoid caffeine - caffeine disturbs blood sugar balance, depletes the body of vital nutrients and is part of a family of chemicals called methyl xanthines which have been shown to contribute to breast tenderness, fibrocystic breast disease and other breast lumps.

Reduce alcohol - Even modest amounts of alcohol have been shown to increase hormone disruption and reduce levels of SHBG which helps bind up excess hormones. Alcohol can also interfere with the metabolism of essential fatty acids. In most cases it will be sufficient to limit alcohol to no more than a few units a week, However, in some conditions, such as with endometriosis or fibroids alcohol elimination may be necessary.

Avoid Sugar - Sugar makes you gain weight, which can oestrogen production and hence further contribute to hormonal problems. High sugar diets also contribute to higher insulin levels which affect your blood sugar balance, metabolism of essential fatty acids and hormone balance. In conditions such as PCOS managing insulin levels are particularly important, hence the avoidance of sugar and refined carbohydrates is of paramount importance in this condition.

## Top Foods to add to your diet

### Oats

Oats are a rich source of B Vitamins which are vital for optimum hormonal balance. They also have a low glycaemic index so release energy slowly helping to stabilise your blood glucose and insulin levels and are also good for your cholesterol levels.

### Mackerel

Oily fish like mackerel are a brilliant source of omega 3 oils and being one of the smaller oily fish, mackerel are less likely to suffer from toxicity than the larger fish such as tuna. The omega 3 oils have been shown to help symptoms of depression, reduce inflammation and production prostaglandin PGE1 which is involved in pain modulation

### Soya beans



Phytoestrogens in soya beans have been shown to improve hormone balance and improve some PMS symptoms.

Other sources of phytoestrogens include fennel, celery, hops, rhubarb, parsley and some wholegrains.

### Linseeds

Linseeds are a great source of the lignan phytoestrogens which have been shown to help balance hormones by increasing sex hormone binding globulin and binding oestrogens in the gut encouraging elimination of oestrogen.

### Broccoli

Broccoli belongs to the family of cruciferous vegetables which also includes things like kale and Brussels sprouts. Cruciferous vegetables contain glucosinolates which help the metabolism of oestrogen. via the cytochrome P450 enzymes in the liver.

## Foods to reduce

What you cut out of your diet is just as important as what you add

### 1. Reduce coffee

Coffee upsets your blood sugar balance and can leave you tired and irritable. In some women moderate amounts of coffee can contribute to breast tenderness.

### 2. Cut out refined sugar

White refined carbohydrates like bread and cakes can give you a quick energy boost but leave you feeling fired. The excess insulin production produced as a response to high glycaemic index (fast sugar releasing) carbohydrates can contribute to disrupted oestrogen balance.

### 3 Reduce or avoid alcohol

Alcohol increases sex steroid concentrations by reducing sex hormone binding globulin. It may also reduce allopregnanolone, contributing to the anxiety symptoms of PMS.

### 4. Reduce saturated fat

Saturated fat from snacks, junk food and an excess consumption of red meat can increase levels of pro-inflammatory PGE2 and stimulate oestrogen over-production.

### 5. Avoid xeno-oestrogens

Limit your exposure to xenoestrogens by limiting your consumption of water from plastic bottles and fats kept (or microwaved) in plastic.

Fruit and vegetables contain vitamins and minerals for healthy hormone balance



#### Recommendation:

- a. Limit red meat to no more than once a week and reduce fat intake from dairy products, fried foods and snacks.
- b. Avoid coffee
- c. Limit alcohol to around 3 units a week.
- d. Avoid sugar and white refined carbohydrates.

#### Other points;

Avoid xeno-oestrogens

These are common hormone-disrupters found in sources such as cling-film, plastic bottles and some non-organic dairy products and meats,.

Reduce stress levels – stress utilises progesterone to make cortisol disturbing the delicate balance of hormones.

Limit your intake of (sodium) salt and sugar in all foods.

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## For more information

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