

BOTTOM LINE
Natural Healing
With Dr. Mark Stengler

DEEPER CURES FROM AMERICA'S TOP NATURAL PHYSICIAN

Bottom Line Publications

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Hormones

Your secrets allies in the weight wars

ARE YOU FIGHTING A WEIGHT-LOSS BATTLE? By eating a healthful diet and exercising regularly, you can shed some weight—but then it's common to “get stuck.” No matter how you modify your diet and exercise regimen, the pounds just stop coming off. What's going on?

Your hormones might be the key. They influence appetite (when and to what degree you desire food)...metabolism (how you convert food to energy)...and insulin sensitivity (the degree to which your cells respond to insulin, which allows your body to use glucose).

If you have hit a plateau—or even have had a reversal—in your weight-loss efforts, it may be time for you to look more closely at your hormone levels.

To start, have them tested by a physician. Hormone levels can be detected from samples of blood, saliva and urine. A knowledgeable holistic doctor will help you interpret the results and choose supplements or other natural solutions that will allow you to lose those additional pounds.

Important factors to consider...

HOW ACTIVE IS YOUR THYROID?

Your body depends on thyroid hormones to regulate your metabolism. These hormones are produced in the butterfly-shaped gland just below your

voice box. If thyroid hormones are in short supply, you can expect to gain weight. Assuming that your physician has ruled out any serious thyroid disease that must be treated in its own right, you can start to beat your weight problem by optimizing your thyroid function.

Natural solutions: For mild deficiencies—perhaps your levels are just a little off or are normal but you still have classic low thyroid symptoms, such as weight gain, fatigue, cold hands and feet, poor memory—look into one of these daily supplements or, even better, a formula that combines several of them. Take them until symptoms are better, and then taper off. If symptoms return, start taking them again—or have a doctor monitor you. If there is no improvement within four weeks, stop taking the supplements.

■ **Bladderwrack** (a type of algae) contains iodine, which the thyroid requires for optimal functioning. *Typical dose:* Two or three 500-mg capsules, in divided doses, for a total of 1,000 to 1,500 mg per day.

■ **L-tyrosine** (an amino acid) helps the thyroid to manufacture hormones. *Typical dose:* 500 mg twice daily on an empty stomach.

■ **Homeopathic thyroid** (a minute dose of thyroid hormone or animal thyroid gland) stimulates your thyroid gland to produce hormones. Follow label directions.

■ **Thyroid glandular** (an extract derived from animal thyroid tissue, typically that of a sheep) contains amino acids, vitamins and minerals that stimulate hormone production. *Typical dose:* One to two capsules or tablets twice daily on an empty stomach.

Best formulas: I recommend Thyroid Support Liquid Phyto-Caps containing Bladderwrack and L-tyrosine from Gaia Herbs (800-831-7780, www.gaiaherbs.com) or Solaray's Thyroid Caps, which has L-tyrosine, iodine and thyroid glandular (800-669-8877, www.nutraceutical.com).

If your lab tests reveal a severe deficiency, you will be prescribed a thyroid hormone replacement program. Ask your doctor about natural thyroid replacement treatments, such as Armour Thyroid, Westroid, Nature-Throid and compounded thyroid tablets.

THE POWER OF DHEA

Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) is an adrenal hormone that enhances metabolism. DHEA levels naturally decline with age. A study of 56 men and women at Washington University School of Medicine found that those who took 50 mg of DHEA daily for six months experienced a reduction in “belly fat” and visceral fat—the fat that builds up around internal organs—both of which are associated with heart disease, diabetes and other serious illnesses. Insulin levels also dropped significantly, indicating better blood sugar control and insulin sensitivity.

Natural solutions: If testing indicates that your DHEA level is low—less than 100 micrograms (mcg)/dL—take DHEA. If not, take one of the other

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supplements described below. Have your levels checked every six months.

■ **DHEA supplements** increase DHEA levels. *Typical dose:* Up to 50 mg once a day. DHEA is available over the counter, but its use should be monitored by a physician. Potential side effects include facial hair growth in women and prostate enlargement in men.

■ **Sterols and sterolins** are plant fats that are chemically similar to animal fats but have different biological functions. Sterols and sterolins support DHEA production by the adrenal glands. Moducare Capsules (800-421-2998, www.moducare.com) contain both nutrients. *Typical dose:* Two capsules in the morning and one before bedtime on an empty stomach.

■ **Cordyceps sinensis** (a medicinal mushroom) also helps support DHEA production. *Typical dose:* 2,400 mg of a standardized water/ethanol extract of *Cordyceps sinensis* strain Cs-4.

THE CORTISOL FACTOR

Prolonged elevation of the stress hormone cortisol can contribute to weight gain. High cortisol levels can interfere with normal thyroid function and decrease insulin sensitivity, both of which lead to weight gain.

Natural solutions: Stress-reduction techniques curb your production of stress hormones. My favorite stress relievers include regular exercise, positive mental imagery and prayer.

Your doctor can order a saliva test to measure your cortisol level. If yours is elevated, consider...

■ **Ashwagandha** (an herb) reduces cortisol levels when taken daily. Look for products containing the patented ingredient Sensoril, which provides optimal concentrations of ashwagandha. Widely available brands include Liquid Anti-Stress Plus Adrenal Support from Life Solutions Natural Products (a company in which I have a financial interest, 800-914-8771, www.lifesolutionsnp.com) and Sensoril

Ashwagandha Tribulus Compound from Jarrow Formulas (800-726-0886, www.jarrow.com).

If cortisol levels have not come down after two months of taking ashwagandha, try...

■ **DHEA**, described above, which also can reduce cortisol levels. *Typical dose:* Up to 50 mg daily, taken under a doctor's supervision.

ESTROGEN DOMINANCE

Most women understand the importance of estrogen, but they might not realize that excessive amounts of this hormone can increase body fat and promote fluid retention. Estrogen in women needs to be "balanced out" with progesterone, which has a diuretic (water-excreting) effect. Premenopause, menopause and any health condition that interferes with ovulation (such as polycystic ovarian syndrome) will reduce levels of progesterone and give fat-building estrogen the upper hand. This is one reason why some women gain weight for no apparent reason.

Natural solutions: The nutrient indole 3-carbinol helps the liver metabolize estrogen. It is found in cruciferous vegetables — broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and kale. I recommend eating at least one plentiful helping of any of these foods each day.

Root Causes of Weight Gain

- Poor diet
- Lack of exercise
- Genetic predisposition
- Hormone imbalance
- Neurotransmitter imbalance, such as serotonin deficiency
- Side effects of drugs
- Toxins, such as chemicals (pesticides)
- Psychological reasons, such as stress, anxiety and depression

If a saliva, blood or urine test shows that your estrogen level is elevated even after you adopt an indole 3-carbinol-rich diet or if you just don't like to eat the above foods, try these daily supplements...

■ **Indole 3-carbinol** helps the body metabolize estrogen. *Typical dose:* 300 mg to 400 mg a day.

■ **Vitex** (also called chasteberry, derived from the berries grown on the *Vitex agnus castus* tree) has been shown to improve the regularity of ovulation and raise progesterone levels. *Typical dose:* 120 mg of a product standardized to 0.6% aucubine or 0.5% agnuside twice daily...or 800 mg of a nonstandardized supplement. Vitex is available from Nature's Way (to find a retailer, call 801-489-1500 or go to www.naturesway.com) and Phytopharmica (800-376-7889, www.phytopharmica.com).

■ **Natural progesterone cream** should be used as directed by your doctor for extreme progesterone deficiencies. *Typical dose:* One-quarter teaspoon (20 mg) applied to the skin one or two times daily for two weeks before menstruation (stop when menses begin) or, if menopausal or postmenopausal, applied once daily. Consider Emerita ProGest (to find a retailer, call 800-648-8211 or go to www.emerita.com), a good brand that is commonly available in health-food stores.

THE TESTOSTERONE FACTOR

Testosterone, a powerful hormone found in women and men, affects the body's ability to maintain lean muscle mass. It is mainly produced by the ovaries in women and the testes in men. A low level makes it more difficult to tone muscles and lose weight.

Natural solutions...

■ **DHEA** is converted by women's bodies into testosterone. If a woman has low DHEA and low testosterone levels, then doctor-supervised supplementation of DHEA, as described on

page 2, may improve both levels.

■ **Panax ginseng** may help boost slightly low levels of testosterone in men and women. *Typical dose:* 200 mg daily of a product standardized to 5% ginsenosides.

■ **Tribulus terrestris** is a plant whose extract may increase testosterone levels in men and women. So far, research has been done mainly with animals, but this herb appears to be safe. Tribulus by Source Naturals (for a retailer, call 800-815-2333 or go to www.sourcenaturals.com) is a good choice, as is Life Solutions Natural Products' Liquid Natural Libido Enhancer (800-914-8771, www.lifesolutionsnp.com), which contains ginseng and, for a calming effect, passionflower.

■ **Natural testosterone** is available by prescription only and should be used when there is a moderate to severe deficiency. I prefer the transdermal gel or cream form, which is applied to the skin, because it requires less metabolism by the liver than pills.

IS INSULIN ON YOUR TEAM?

Blood sugar (glucose) is terrific fuel

for an active person, but you need the right level of insulin to transport the sugar from your bloodstream into tissue. A condition known as insulin resistance occurs when cells become less accepting of glucose and insulin levels spike. It is one factor that sets the stage for weight gain.

Natural solutions...

■ **High-fiber diet** that includes seven to nine daily servings of fresh vegetables as well as three servings of whole-grain breads and cereals. Nuts, seeds and raw vegetables are especially good to help balance insulin levels. Stay away from simple-sugar food products, such as white breads, pasta, soft drinks, cookies and other sweets. For protein, avoid fatty red meats and favor quality sources, such as legumes, nuts, eggs, fish and poultry.

■ **Help yourself to cinnamon!** Research shows that it helps balance blood sugar levels.

■ **Eat smaller servings** throughout the day rather than three big meals, so your body metabolizes food more effectively.

■ **High-potency multivitamin/mineral supplement.** Everyone should

take one daily for general health—it provides nutrients that, among other things, balance insulin levels.

If tests for fasting blood glucose and insulin indicate that you have insulin resistance, try taking all three of these additional supplements daily...

■ **Chromium** (a mineral) is particularly important to balance blood sugar levels. *Typical dose:* 400 mcg.

■ **Alpha lipoic acid** (an enzyme that acts as a powerful antioxidant) reduces levels of insulin and blood sugar. *Typical dose:* Up to 200 mg.

■ **Fish oil** (an essential fatty acid supplement) improves insulin sensitivity. *Typical dose:* One teaspoon daily or a one-gram capsule, three times a day. Nordic Naturals fish oil supplements are widely available and free of mercury and other toxins (to locate a retailer, call 800-662-2544 or go to www.nordicnaturals.com). *Caution:* If you are taking a blood-thinning medication, such as *warfarin* (Coumadin), check with your doctor before taking fish oil. ■

Reference

DHEA's effect on abdominal fat: D.T. Villarreal, J.O. Holloszy, *Journal of the American Medical*