



Exploring the Connection Between Women’s Hormonal Imbalances and Mental Health

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Our mental health is an essential aspect of our overall well-being. We are developing a greater awareness that factors beyond our immediate control often influence our ability to maintain it. An increasing amount of research illustrates how women's hormonal fluctuations play a significant role in regulating their moods and emotions, which are, in turn, essential aspects of mental health. However, women also commonly encounter negative social attitudes and beliefs,

gender stereotypes, stigma, and misconceptions related to menstruation, menopause, and other hormonal changes. As a result, women's experiences are often dismissed, trivialized, or invalidated by people who lack an understanding of the biological and physiological processes that contribute to hormonal fluctuations.

Sometimes, this behaviour can also be a way for someone to assert power and control in a woman's interpersonal relationships, social situations, and workplaces. Belittling contributes to feelings of shame, embarrassment, and self-doubt. However, with an increasing number of women struggling with anxiety and depression, perhaps it's time to

In this article, we'll look at how hormonal fluctuations can affect mental health, particularly the incidence of anxiety and depression,

Fluctuations or imbalances in these hormones can affect both physical and mental health. For example, shifts in estrogen and progesterone levels during the menstrual cycle can influence neurotransmitter activity and contribute to mood swings or irritability. Changes in serotonin, a neurotransmitter affecting mood, can lead to feelings of sadness or anxiety. Imbalances in cortisol can disrupt thyroid function and cause inflammation in the body, which can affect energy levels.

How does someone recognize or find out about hormonal imbalances?

Since hormones are the messengers within our bodies that help keep them well-functioning, when someone starts to feel off, even small changes where there is "too much or too little of a

Life Stage	Menstrual Cycle Characteristics	Mental Health Considerations	

*Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

Many people are aware of premenstrual syndrome but may not realize that “it’s estimated that as many 3 of every 4 menstruating” people experience it.⁸ Symptoms can affect someone’s physical and emotional health and range from “slightly noticeable all the way to intense.”⁹

**Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)

A small number (5-15%) of menstruating people experience “disabling symptoms” that affect them physically and emotionally every month.¹⁰ With PMDD, mood disturbances are more intense. They can “seriously impact relationships and impair functioning” to the point where “clinical levels of depression or anxiety” are experienced before each menstrual cycle.¹¹ If someone experiences significant PMDD that brings up suicidal ideation, they should discuss this with their medical professional to see what treatment options may be available to them (medication, psychotherapy, a combination, etc.).

***Postpartum Depression (PPD)

It’s estimated that up to 20% of women experience PPD after giving birth as the body goes through significant changes physically and hormonally. Emotional and social stress also contribute to the severe nature of this condition. While sudden drops in estrogen and progesterone can be the catalyst for depression to set in, other post-partum hormonal messaging chemicals such as oxytocin and prolactin can play a role. Disrupted sleep cycles, along with changing social roles and responsibilities and difficulty bonding with the infant, create stress and anxiety, or even psychotic symptoms.¹² Poor nutrition during the early weeks postpartum can also be traced to incidences of PPD because neurotransmitters like serotonin can be low as the brain “struggle[s]” to make enough.¹³ Scientists emphasize that “proper nutrition is essential for the production of neurotransmitters,” which, in turn, help stabilize our moods.

What kinds of practical strategies can be used to help support hormonal balance naturally?

While hormonal fluctuations are a natural part of life, there are lifestyle interventions that can help support better hormone regulation.

1. **A healthy diet** rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy fats can help support hormone production. People should also strive to increase their hydration levels.
2. **Regular exercise** involving cardio-style movement and strength training to build muscle and maintain bone is essential. Strive for at least 30 minutes daily, five days a

week, with two days focused on building strength. Exercise reduces stress, improves mood and sleep, and regulates hormone levels.

3. **Stress reduction** through meditation, relaxation, yoga, and breathwork will reduce cortisol levels and help improve health and well-being. Over time, you may recognize that your response to stressful situations is within your control.
4. **High-quality sleep** is crucial to hormone regulation and overall mental well-being. Most adults need at least 7 hours per night to start to see the benefits.

What treatment options are available to help?

Professional support from medical practitioners is critical. It can be incredibly challenging to determine what kinds of personalized treatment plans may be most effective.

Always work with accredited and licenced professionals

A multi-disciplinary health team approach should include primary care physicians, gynecologists, endocrinologists, naturopaths, psychologists, pharmacists, and registered dietitians. Their collective expertise can help evaluate symptoms, review medical history, and consider overall health. Professional diagnostic testing of blood, saliva and urine is essential. They can arrange for comprehensive panels that examine reproductive, adrenal, and metabolic hormone levels.

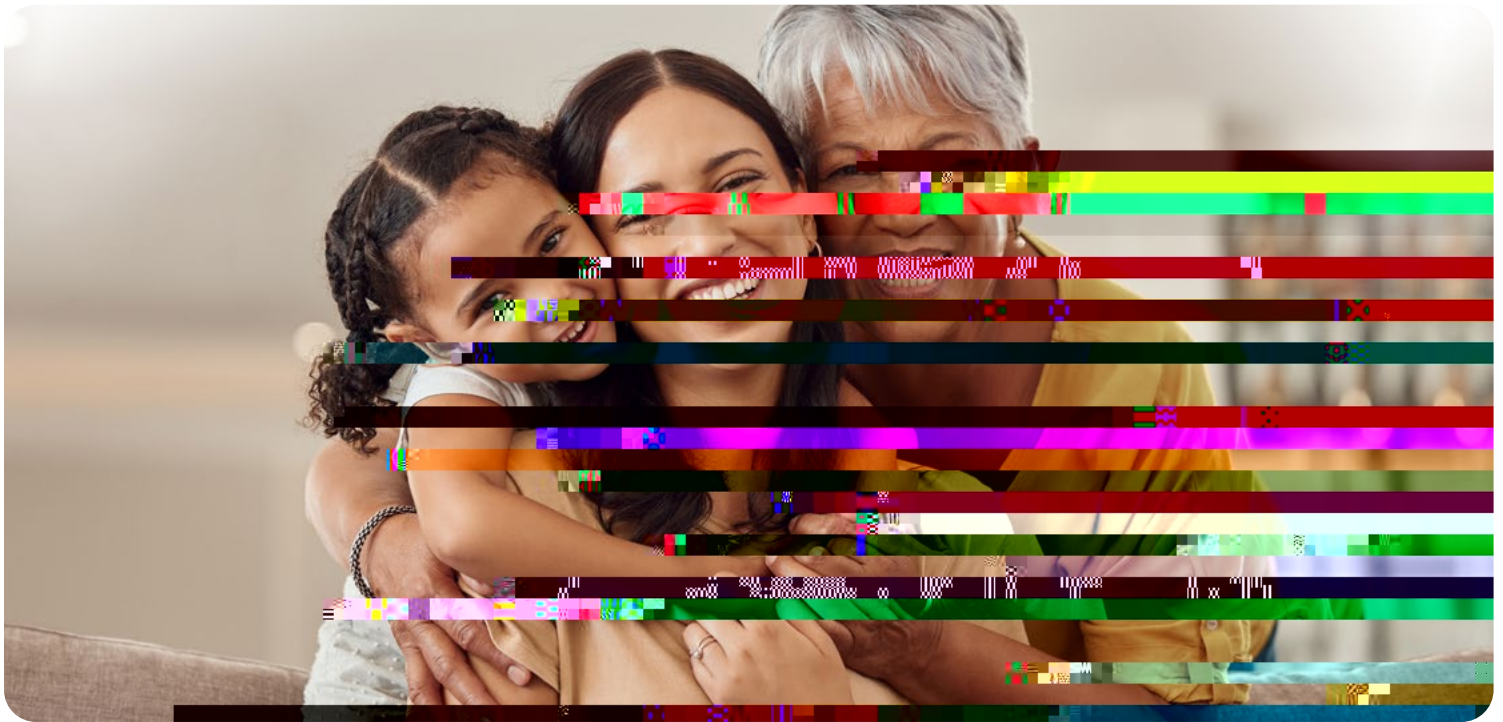
Hormone replacement therapies may be an alternative

In consultation with your care team, you may explore whether hormone replacement therapy (HRT), which uses synthetic or animal-derived hormones to supplement your body’s levels and alleviate symptoms of imbalance is a good option for you. Another alternative may be to use bio-identical hormones from plant sources that are chemically identical to those naturally produced by the body. Individual medical risks and benefits need careful evaluation so that you can determine the duration and whether this kind of treatment may help.

Women’s health is often overlooked and undervalued. It’s time to change that.

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