

*Throughout our lives we encounter hormonal readjustments. But for some of us, those sneaky hormones can pack on the pounds especially as we get older. Fluffy over 50 doesn't have to be your destiny though!* BY LISA MORETTI

# Is Your Waistline Being Held Hostage By **HORMONES?**

**WHEN IT COMES** to hormones and weight gain/loss, one of the first things to look at is your coping threshold for stress. Sometimes we handle stress really well, and then there are those other times we just lose it! We fly off the handle, scorch and burn those around us, even leave ourselves wondering why that moment got the better of us. Our coping threshold is often dictated by a unique interplay of our mind, body and spirit: our mental state helps us reason out through the situation; our hormones dictate our physical and emotional responses, and our spirit enables us to stand firm against the onslaught of life. The one element in the mix most of us have the least conscious awareness of is our hormonal balance. If our hormones are out of balance and we surpass our coping threshold, we get fat. We pack on fluff thanks to cortisol, turn to comfort foods trying to make feel-good neurotransmitters, scramble our normal leptin-ghrelin feedback loop that lets us know when we are hungry and/or full, and we can even be forced to navigate a web of depression.

Fat is stored energy for a rainy day. Our primal brain even stores it in areas of the body that don't get a lot of use on a daily basis, so that it really is a "savings account." But what is the definition of a "rainy day?" In primal times, it was being chased by a saber-toothed tiger – you needed quick energy to get away fast when adrenaline signaled your brain that it was

go-time. These days it's a never-ending litany of tax returns, childcare pick up and carpools, the daily commute, a workout schedule, calorie obsession and CNN.

While most of us can manage our weight with a simple calories in/calories out formula, if your hormones are out of balance you can be gaining weight on just 500 calories a day. Panic alarm!!

## **Rolling Up the Fat Welcome Mat**

Dr. David Borenstein (DavidBorensteinmd.com) is one of the country's leading Integrative Physicians based in New York City. He and his wife, Laurie, who specializes in nutrition, help patients find their hormone balance again with natural, dietary and medical interventions. Dr. Borenstein says, "Absolutely the most important thing you must learn to do, not only for weight control but for health and longevity, is to manage your stress."

Integrative medicine focuses on getting to the root causes of problems and while some hormonal changes over the course of life are to be expected, when we see massive implications of hormonal imbalance, there may be nutritional, biochemical and even systemic problems. Or it might be your environment. Is it time to get rid of the Plug-Ins aromatically wreaking hormonal havoc with chemical mimics on your

# If you feel out of whack and your doctor says, “You’re okay, you’re within your (hormone) range,” *roll your inner tube out the door and find a new doc.*

world? Or it might be time to trim off that 160-pound toxic human in your life. Maybe it’s time to finally ditch the dead-end job and do what you truly love!

Rather than just putting a Band-Aid over the problem and treating the symptoms, it’s time to get to the nitty gritty root of the problem – and 90 percent of the time that problem is being fertilized by stress, especially when it’s something we don’t want to acknowledge or fear. The hormone in the driver’s seat when it comes to stress is cortisol. It’s actually the hormone of life – it wakes you up and puts you to sleep – unless you have so much stress that your cortisol levels are erratic, upside down or flat-lined.

If we don’t deal with stress, we burn out our adrenal glands, which are designed to respond with fight-flight-freeze triggered by hormonal releases. Most of us live in a world that has a background “soundtrack” of chronic, grinding stress. Stress can be stalking us in things we don’t even really notice – loud television, living under a flight path, our neighbors who fight regularly, the micromanager at work. We tend to dismiss these things as just part of life, but they aren’t really supposed to be! Child development expert Dr. Bruce Perry (childtrauma.org) has noticed that more and more (especially since television has become so much a part of our daily lives) people are in fight/flight/freeze from infancy and their bodies

never learn to relax and their hormones are never at “normal.”

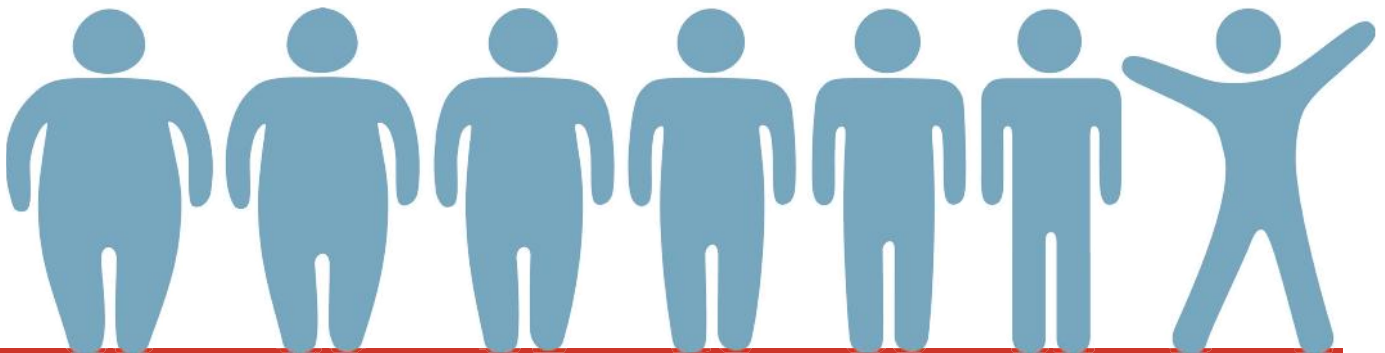
Dr. Borenstein notes that as women approach perimenopause and the ovaries begin to shut down, the adrenal glands begin to produce hormones. Your poor adrenal glands are already exhausted, and now they have to be the top hormone producer, too? UGH!

By supporting our bodies with good nutrition, the proper amount of exercise and some supplementation, approaching 50 doesn’t have to mean getting fluffy. Dr. Borenstein believes that after addressing your stress levels, the next thing is to assess your hormone levels. A good practitioner will request a hormone panel; a fantastic doctor will review your levels with you and will remember that YOU are not a lab range! Ranges are based on averages and those bell curves have been shifting over time; what was out of range and cause for alarm 20 years ago is now “within range” and “normal”...except there is still an inner tube around your tummy. If you feel out of whack and your doctor says, “You’re okay, you’re within range,” roll your inner tube out the door and find a new doc.

## Hormonal Changes Are Not a Disease

Surprisingly, there has been an ongoing battle to NOT classify menopause (and andropause, a.k.a. male menopause) as a disease! Every body will go through a series of changes from the day we are born; hormones affect everything from bone strength, muscle density, injury recovery and energy levels to mood and emotional balance, reproduction and our stress responses.

Dr. Alyssa Dweck (drdweck.com), an OB-GYN in practice in New York and co-author of “V is for Vagina,” notes that hormonal changes are a natural part of life; hormonal changes are not a disease state. She counsels her clients to focus on making positive healthy lifestyle choices; she likes the Mediterranean style of diet, stress-reducing exercise, and she reminds her patients that there is no “one-size-fits-all” answer. One of Dr. Dweck’s particular concerns for women is diabetes.



## 6 Things You Can Do Today To Ensure Your Success:

1. Dr. Borenstein’s top supplement recommendations are DHEA and Pregnenolone, the two master hormones that are the precursors for all other hormones. Work with a professional to find your correct supplementation dosage to give your body the building materials it needs.

2. Both Dr. Dweck and Dr. Borenstein recommend getting a full blood panel and paying special attention to insulin

levels. (You can order your own panel at MyMedLab.com.)

3. Dr. Sara Gottfried advocates getting smart about hormones and start using biohacking information and knowledge to put things back on course. Dr. Gottfried’s book, *The Hormone Cure*, is a great starting point.

4. Ensure your success (and make some new friends) by joining a group like TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly tops.org)

or Spark People (sparkpeople.com).

Research shows that people who use a buddy system have a much higher rate of success and of making lasting lifestyle changes.

5. Reduce the toxic mayhem in your environment; log onto Donna Kasuska’s ChemConscious.com/detoxify-your-life to find out how.

6. Use Mindfulness to reorient the psychology of your biology.

**Super Secret Bonus 1** — Increase your fiber intake. Try to incorporate up to 50 grams of fiber in your diet each day. Soluble fiber is the Sham-Wow of cellular biochemistry. It soaks up excess hormones and sugars and moves ‘em out before they cause problems.

**Super Secret Bonus 2** — Exercise! When you move, you clean out the trash in your body via your lymphatic system and you reset your endocrine system.

She notes, "according to the CDC, 13.4 million women were diagnosed with diabetes in 2012. Of those, around 1.2 million were also in menopause. Dealing with the vexing symptoms of menopause and struggling to keep diabetes in check is a double-whammy!" That double whammy can mean compromised cardiovascular health, weaker bones, painful intercourse, UTIs and dangerous falls. Dr. Dweck recommends working with a professional to find your best supplement regimen and, if needed, proper bio-identical hormone therapy.

### Biohacking Your Hormones for a Flatter Tummy

Biohacking is a relatively new term; it refers to using technology and data to tweak your biology. Dr. Sara Gottfried ([saragottfriedmd.com](http://saragottfriedmd.com)) is a *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Hormone Cure* and the upcoming book, *The Hormone Reset Diet*. She also is an eloquent proponent of biohacking, especially for women who are hormonally off-kilter. One of the first indicators of hormonal problems is flab and fluff around our waistlines, as our brown fat starts backfilling hormones. Dr. Gottfried points out, "Two hormones dictate belly fat: cortisol and growth hormone. The best way to biohack these hormones for a flatter tummy is twofold: First, slash stress with supplements so that cortisol isn't stimulating your muffin top, such as rhodiola or phosphatidyl serine. Second, burst train (for a minimum of 7 bursts for 30 to 60 seconds of high-intensity intervals) to reset growth hormone." Burst training is high intensity, short duration exercise. Find plenty of examples on the Web.



### Your Biology Is In Your Psychology

Harvard professor and social psychologist, Dr. Ellen Langer ([ellenlanger.com](http://ellenlanger.com)), has been doing experiments that demonstrate that you're only as old as you think you are! For more than 30 years, Dr. Langer has been testing the notion

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that if we could turn back the clock psychologically, could we also turn it back physically? In her book, *Counterclockwise*, Dr. Langer presents her conclusive answer: opening our minds to what's possible, instead of clinging to accepted notions about what's not, can lead to better health at any age.

Dr. Langer's work on aging (or not aging) shows how mindless speech, our ingrained and unexamined notions about physical limitations and our belief in the absolute certainty of a medical diagnosis/opinion can affect our health, our weight, our vision, our heart health and even diseases like cancer. If we are able to reorient our attitudes and use mindfulness to help us examine our thoughts, actions and beliefs, Dr. Langer has shown we can create vibrancy and good health along with fundamental happiness. In an overlooked but important way, mindfulness actually has huge implications for our hormonal balance and stress management.

### Are Your Hormones Confused?

A new phenomenon in our pre-packaged, ultra-processed world is endocrine disruptors. These are chemicals that mimic our natural hormones and disrupt their normal functions. Donna Kasuska ([chemconscious.com](http://chemconscious.com)) is a chemical engineer who helps companies protect workers in their plants. One day she realized that the very chemicals she was protecting people from in the factories were the same ones sneaking into our homes in a myriad of disguises (visit MS&F online at [maxsportsandfitness.com](http://maxsportsandfitness.com) to see a list). Kasuska maintains a website and has a new book coming out; she warns that endocrine interrupters in household products can:

- Increase production of certain hormones while they decrease production of others
- Turn one hormone into another
- Interfere with hormone signaling
- Tell cells to die prematurely
- Compete with essential nutrients
- Bind to essential hormones
- Accumulate in organs that produce hormones and are shunted to our fat cells when the body doesn't know what to do with them



These masked marauders can cause developmental problems to the nervous systems of children exposed to them, are linked to prostate cancer in men, can possibly cause ADHD/ADD as well hyperactivity in children, play a role in thyroid cancer and breast cancer, cause obesity, interfere with fertility, cause learning and memory problems, trigger adult-onset diabetes and are involved with cardiovascular disease.

In conclusion, whether it's from environmental toxins, toxic thoughts, toxic levels of stress or toxic foods, the muffin top on your hips or the donut around your belly button can be tamed and tossed away. Take a moment to inventory your world and to determine what is currently messing with your hormones and what has the potential to wreak havoc. You can pro-actively change the things that are causing you to gain weight, even with a proper diet and plenty of exercise. If you're still stymied, find an attentive physician or have your own hormone test done. You can use foods as well as nutraceuticals to bring your hormones back in line. **MS&F**

# FACTOID

## FAT MAKES HORMONES

As our reproductive glands begin to deactivate, the brown fat in our torso steps in to start trying to backfill the hormone shortage. We often see more fat cells "sprout" as our hormone levels drop. Abdominal fat converts testosterone into estradiol in both sexes. Giving extra testosterone to an obese man may make matters worse. A 50-year-old man can often have more circulating estradiol if he has extra belly fat than a 50-year-old woman!

