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Natural Progesterone

Natural progesterone is the exact same hormone that is produced by a woman's ovary. It is made from naturally occurring plant steroids found in the wild yam. It is NOT the synthetic version that is commonly purchased as tablets with a prescription such as Provera. The synthetic progesterone can produce severe side effects including increased risk of cancer, abnormal menstrual flow, fluid retention, nausea, and depression. Side effects are extremely rare with natural progesterone. The only one of concern is that it might slightly alter the timing of the menstrual cycle.

Natural progesterone is very useful to balance excess estrogen. Natural progesterone is also different from estrogen in that your body can use it as a precursor or starting material to make other hormones such as adrenal hormones. It can even convert it into estrogen or testosterone if your body needs it. The table on the next page lists the properties of estrogen relative to progesterone. Some of the reasons that estrogen is frequently in excess in many women are:

1. Over production of estrogen. Ovarian cysts or tumors can lead to excess estrogen production. Stress also increases production, but probably the most common cause is obesity. All body fat has an enzyme which converts adrenal steroids to estrogen, so the more fat you have, the more estrogen is present.
2. Inability to breakdown estrogen. Excess estrogen is generally removed by the liver. Diseases of the liver like cirrhosis or decreased enzyme activity can lead to increased estrogen levels. Vitamin B6 and magnesium are necessary for the liver to neutralize estrogen. Increased sugar intake will also excrete magnesium and interfere with its ability to breakdown estrogen.
3. Exposure to pesticides in foods. Most of us eat foods that have pesticides on them. These and many other unnatural chemicals share a common structure with estrogen and serve as "false" estrogens which further stimulates the body's estrogen receptors.
4. Estrogen supplementation. Clearly any additional estrogen given by prescription will increase the level unless it is properly balanced with natural progesterone.

5. Decreased production of progesterone. Progesterone is necessary to counterbalance estrogen. If women do not ovulate during their cycle they will not produce any progesterone that cycle. This happens commonly and worsens the already disturbed progesterone/estrogen balance.

For More Detailed Information on Natural Progesterone:

You can purchase *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Menopause* by Dr. John Lee. It is paperback book for \$13 and was published in May of 1996 so it is very current. Most any bookstore can order it for you.

PMS

Progesterone and estrogen levels rise and fall naturally during the menstrual cycle. However, if progesterone is too low or estrogen is too high, a woman will experience symptoms. Some common symptoms of PMS include water retention, breast soreness, migraines, mood swings and cramping.

Supplementing natural progesterone in a way that simulates the body's own cycle of progesterone production helps bring the body back to an even level, and thus can help decrease symptoms. Everyone is different. Some women require more natural progesterone cream to help alleviate symptoms, while other women can use less. The correct amount of cream for one woman is not necessarily the right amount for another.

Day 1 is considered the first day of your menstrual flow. Although the time of ovulation varies from woman to woman, the time from ovulation to menstruation is generally 12-14 days. The time of ovulation can be determined by a dramatic change in basal body temperature (a sudden fall and subsequent rise) and by a change in vaginal secretion (from a thin discharge to a thick mucous). Some women also experience lower abdominal pains during ovulation.

You will either have a 28 or 35 day cycle. In a 28 day cycle, ovulation usually occurs on Day 14. If you have a 35 day cycle, ovulation generally occurs around Day 21. You will want to use:

1/16 teaspoon (one half of the small side of the measuring spoon) of natural progesterone TWICE a day from the day ovulation begins until the first day of your period. However, this should only be a maximum of 3 weeks of using the cream. (The three weeks applies if you have a 35 day cycle. And then you will need to be off the cream for one week.)

You do not need progesterone while menstruating. If your period is coming in a day or two you should stop using the cream when menstruation occurs or when you feel it is just starting. However, if you have only been on the cream for less than ten days continue the cream for the full two weeks, otherwise your cycle will be disrupted. You should rub the cream vigorously on your palms of your DRY hands for 10-60 seconds until it all absorbed. Try not to wash your hands for 2 minutes after

applying.

It is best to begin using progesterone cream at the time of ovulation. If you have symptoms prior to ovulation (i.e. migraines), you may begin using the progesterone earlier, and use until menstruation begins--then stop during your cycle. It is important to have a "break-time" during the month from using the cream to allow your body to regulate itself and have a period of time at a low hormone level. As time goes by and symptoms diminish, try cutting back each month on the amount of natural progesterone you use. If symptoms return, resume previous usage and try to cut back the following month. Ultimately your goal is to be symptom-free. If you have no symptoms for several months and symptoms recur, you may want to use the cream on an as-needed basis.

Menopause

At the onset of menopause, estrogen and progesterone production by the ovaries tapers off and many women experience symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, mood changes, and vaginal dryness and/or discomfort. Many women also experience irregular periods. These same symptoms may also occur after a hysterectomy which is sometimes referred to as "surgical menopause". Rather than regulate the menstrual cycle of a menopausal woman, natural progesterone helps with many of the symptoms of menopause.

All women experience menopause differently. Some women need more natural progesterone than others. The correct amount of natural progesterone for one woman is not necessarily the right amount for another. Since many of you do not have an actual cycle/period, it is important to regulate the use of the cream by weeks. We recommend using 1/16 tsp twice a day for 2 weeks -- then stop for 2 weeks. Then start again for 3 weeks, then stop for week, etc. You are creating a cycle.

You can use the 1/16 tsp of the cream in your vagina if it feels dry or uncomfortable in addition to or in place of your above described daily application. You may occasionally use extra cream for immediate relief of symptoms as needed, but not more than a few days in a row. For hot flashes or night sweats, use 1/16 tsp every 15 minutes for one hour following the episode.

Some women find that they must use 1/16 tsp twice a day every day to get relief from menopausal symptoms. If you feel that skipping the week would make you uncomfortable you may use the cream for 3 and one half weeks and come off of it for 3-4 days. But it is important to have at least several days without the cream. This allows your body to regulate itself and to have a lower hormone level for a time during the month.

We also recommend that you stop the use of any estrogen you might be using. However, if your symptoms are too uncomfortable we suggest that you gradually decrease your estrogen use over time until it is no longer needed. For example, if you are on Premarin--cut back the dosage by skipping one pill every week, then

every six days. Every few weeks, try to cut back more until you are completely off of it. If hot flashes and other symptoms occur--then you know that you have tried to go off of estrogen too quickly. You need to go back to the previous dose--and then try to cut back again the following month. You can also use a natural estrogen patch called Climara.

Some women may be concerned that by stopping the use of estrogen, that they will not receive the cardiovascular benefits that estrogen has been given credit for. Unfortunately this information was taken from a flawed study that was based on a survey, not a double blind trial. The study did not separate out patients with risk factors who were not on estrogen. While it is true that estrogen will improve cholesterol levels, this is not necessarily connected with decreased risk of heart disease. There are some newer studies which strongly suggest that in fact natural progesterone has a more potent benefit for heart disease than estrogen. It is important to recognize that this is a benefit of natural progesterone, NOT synthetic progesterone which will actually increase one's risk of heart disease.

For post-menopausal women who are currently using estrogen supplements, the initial effect of progesterone will make your estrogen receptors sensitive. This will in turn lead to heightened estrogen effects--such as breast swelling and tenderness, fluid retention or even the appearance of scant vaginal bleeding. Therefore, it is probably best to reduce your estrogen dose by one-half when starting on progesterone. Later, after 3-4 months of progesterone use, many women can reduce their estrogen dose further or eventually discontinue it, using the adequacy of your vaginal secretions as your guide. In postmenopausal women the cream should be used for two to three weeks of the month and then discontinued until the next month. You need to come off of the cream for at least one week of the month. If after using the cream for a week or so and some spotting occurs, it is best to stop the cream for 12 days and then start again.

During the peri-menopausal period (the time shortly before menopause), women experience changing patterns of menstruation, including missed cycles. The addition of natural progesterone may temporarily bring a return to normal monthly bleeding. The progesterone brings a temporary heightened sensitivity of estrogen receptors which may lead the woman to conclude that progesterone caused her menses. But in fact, it is now the normal level of estrogen that caused the endometrium to shed. Stopping the progesterone each month (cycling) allowed the bleeding to occur. This is a normal state of affairs and not a cause for alarm.

Applying the Cream

To apply the cream, the BEST site is the palms of your DRY hands. Make sure your hands are dry BEFORE you apply the cream or it will be difficult for it to go in. Be certain not to wash your hands for one to two minutes after applying the cream. In patients who are already low in progesterone, it will first be absorbed into the body fat. With continued use, fat levels of progesterone reach a balance. Therefore, the following doses of progesterone result in increased blood levels and stronger effects.

For this reason it may take two to three months of use before one experiences maximum benefits.

As you have continued exposure of hormone signals, this will eventually lead to reduced sensitivity of your hormonal receptors. Our receptors "tune down" their sensitivity to prolonged exposure by the receptor stimulator. This is obvious in the case of sound or light. For example, a sufficient period of quiet will bring about renewed sensitivity to sound. And a period of darkness will bring about increased sensitivity to dim light, (so-called "dark adaption").

Here's why it is important: The same is true of hormones. As in a normal cycle there is a week of the month when hormone levels are very low. This is why you need to maintain some sort of a cycle with the cream, so that your body is allowed a time of low hormone levels--as in a normal cycle.

Measurement of your progesterone levels is sometimes helpful. We perform the test on your saliva. The best time to take the measurement would be the morning in the middle of your progesterone cycle. You can ask our office about obtaining a kit to collect the saliva specimen. The specimen is relatively stable but must be received at the California lab within a week of collection.

It is highly likely that after your body becomes use to the progesterone you will only need 1/32 of a teaspoon twice a day. A very tiny dose indeed. At this dose a jar or tube will nearly last you an entire year.