

## Wondering if you have hormone problems?

Here are some of the common symptoms and conditions that suggest that the answer is YES:

- **Acne**
- **Depression**
- **Endometriosis**
- **Fertility problems**
- **Fibroids**
- **Insulin resistance/metabolic syndrome**
- **Irregular or painful periods**
- **Miscarriage history**
- **Monthly breast tenderness and lumps**
- **PMS**
- **Polycystic ovarian syndrome**
- **Premature puberty**
- **Weight issues**
- **Breast or uterine cancer**

## If so, environmental toxins may be a cause!

Chemicals called endocrine (or hormone) disruptors, are prevalent in the plastics in our food containers, the herbicides, pesticides, and hormones used to grow our foods, in our water supply systems as a result of contamination from agriculture and manufacturing, in the flame retardants in clothes, cars, and home furnishings, in cigarette smoke (including second- and third-hand smoke effects), and even in our cosmetics. In fact, hand sanitizers and toothpaste commonly contain a chemical called triclosan, which is an endocrine disruptor. It has shown up on blood tests I've done looking for environmental toxins in patients struggling with hormonal problems, including fertility challenges.

In just 70 years, nearly 100,000 new chemicals have been released into the environment and more than 85% of these have never been tested for their health effects in humans! We also have very little scientific knowledge about what happens when these chemicals combine in our bodies! We do know that even as early as at the time of birth, newborns are already contaminated with almost 300 environmental chemicals. Emerging research now suggests that in fact, many of them may be quite toxic to our health. And one of the biggest areas of impact is on our hormones.

## What is a Hormone Disruptor?

We hear the term “hormone” a lot, but what does it really mean? The most basic definition is that hormones are chemicals produced by the body, in nature, or synthetically that influence the growth and development processes of the body by sending messages between cells all around the body.

Our bodies produce numerous hormones. You’ve no doubt heard of **estrogen**, which is actually a group of chemicals that gives us our curvy feminine shapes, keeps our bones strong, grows our uterine lining giving us our monthly cycles, and keeps us moist in the right places, amongst numerous other functions, **progesterone**, which helps to regulate our cycles and stabilizes pregnancy, and **testosterone**, often thought of as a male hormone, but which also has important actions in women. Other hormones include our **thyroid** hormones which regulate energy, weight, and metabolism, keeps our hair thick and healthy, our cycles regular, and our brain function sharp, **insulin**, which regulates how we use our blood sugar, proteins, fats, and carbohydrates, **leptin** which tells us when we are full, **cortisol** which determines our ability to respond to stress in our environment and also regulates our immune system, and **oxytocin**, sometimes called “the love hormone” because it is abundant in new moms after birth, and influences love and a sense of bonding in us throughout our lives.

**Hormone disruptors are chemical contaminants in the environment that mimic our own natural hormones, and in doing so, scramble the messages our cells are giving to each other.**

They can have an impact, from minor to major, on any of the above hormones, but most frequently, mimic estrogen. These mixed messages can cause the imbalances behind most of the hormonal conditions women experience, and can cause serious diseases, including diabetes and cancer. When pregnant moms are exposed, they may even interfere with critical developmental stages in the baby-in-utero, increasing our babies’ risks of developing birth defects and increasing their long-term risks of being overweight and developing hormonal problems and even diabetes and cancer!

**Nobody knows the extent of the harmful effects these hormone disruptors have on our bodies, nor how much it takes to cause a harmful impact – but the latest evidence is that it only takes miniscule amounts — and we are exposed to many of these on a daily basis.**

We also know that hormone-disrupting chemicals persist in the environment for decades or longer. DDT, for example, a pesticide that was banned in the US in 1972, can still be found not only in the soil, but also in the blood of those born even after its use was discontinued!

## **Avoiding Hormone Disruptors**

Our daily choices have an enormous impact on reducing our daily toxin exposure. Here are the top 10 things you can do to limit your exposure to hormone disruptors:

1. **Be Beautiful with Smarts!** Use toxin-free cosmetics. Avoid those products, including soaps and shampoos, which contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals, including antibacterial soaps. [Skin Deep](#) is an excellent resource for learning which cosmetics and ingredients are safe. There are so many lovely options.
2. **Be Smoke Free:** If you smoke, get help to stop. Whenever possible, avoid second- and third-hand smoke (surfaces, including clothes and computer keyboards, that smokers have been using).
3. **Use Clean Cleaners:** Household cleaning products are a common source of endocrine disruptors. Visit the Environmental Working Group website to learn about healthy home cleaners, or really get jiggy with it and make your own – vinegar can do wondrous things!
4. **Beware of Cookware:** Non-stick pots are a major source of toxic chemicals, some of which can disrupt your hormones. Instead use stainless steel, cast iron, and tempered glass.
5. **Dress for Health:** This is especially important for our kids – the flame retardants in children's clothes and pajamas are known endocrine disruptors. Instead, use cotton and other untreated natural fibers.
6. **Home Sweet Home Furnishings:** Like kids' jammies, flame retardant chemicals are in our sofas, carpets, and other home furnishings. While it is more work to source out natural home furnishings, your health is worth it!
7. **Opt for Organic:** There's no doubt that all of our dairy should be organic only, and all of our meats, poultry, and fish ecologically raised. As for fruits and vegetables, a safe approach that is also economical, is to either go

organic or avoid the foods on the [EWG Dirty Dozen](#), the produce that is most heavily contaminated, and then do what you can to go organic.

8. **Pass on the Plastic:** Chemicals in plastic food and beverage packaging are known endocrine disruptors and easily leech into our foods. I stopped drinking out of all plastic water bottles a few years ago and have been happily using a [Life Factory](#) water bottle since. I've gotten one for all of my family members, too. I also try to purchase foods with as little plastic packaging as possible, and don't store, reheat, or prepare food in plastic containers. Affordable glass and stainless steel containers are easily available at places like Target and Wal-Mart, or online at Amazon.
9. **Be Water-Wise:** Our water sources are contaminated with endocrine disrupting chemicals, and even many of the water purification chemicals used for municipal water are endocrine disruptors. Drinking filtered water can minimize your exposure.
10. **Weigh in on Health:** Hormone disruptors are lipophilic – that means fat-loving. The more fat stores we have, the more hormones disruptors we pick up and store in our bodies.

## Heal the Damage, Rebalance Your Hormones

As a functional medicine physician and herbalist I help a lot of women with hormonal problems. In fact, it's probably one of the things I do most often – as you can see above, the list of health problems involving hormones is extensive!

**Here are the top 5 things I recommend to my patients to prevent and heal hormonal imbalances from endocrine disruptors.**

1. **Get a move on:** Having a daily BM helps your body to clear out excess hormones. Flax, magnesium citrate, and plenty of fiber-rich greens are a girl's best friend for a good daily poop!
2. **Go green:** Eat dark leafy greens – steamed, sautéed, and in salads. Kale, broccoli, broccoli sprouts, collards, and Brussels sprouts all have important chemical constituents (glucosinolates, sulforaphanes, indole-3-carbinol) that help your body to clear out the excess environmental hormones, especially estrogen. Greens also feed the good gut flora that is necessary for hormone detoxification and good daily bowel evacuation.
3. **Take a daily probiotic...** Again, important for detox and elimination of hormones.

4. **Take care of your liver:** This is where the bulk of the endocrine disruptors are detoxified, so avoid excess alcohol and also medications like Tylenol that tax your liver. Herbs that specifically support the liver include turmeric, artichoke leaf, milk thistle, and dandelion root, all of which can be taken daily.
5. **Take supplements that support detoxification:** My favorites are curcumin from turmeric, DIM, I3C, quercetin, milk thistle, calcium-d-glucarate, resveratrol, green tea extract, and NAC. (Note: detox should not be done while pregnant or nursing, and these supplements, ok while nursing, most are NOT ok during pregnancy). Here are several products that include these herbs and supplements, to make your search easier: [Liver Health](#) by Herb Pharm, XenoProtX by Xymogen, Endocrine Disruptor Relief by Vitonica, Liver Cleanse by Gaia Herbs, and Liver Health by Gaia Herbs.

## **Changing Your Health is Changing the World!**

I'm a firm believer that the steps we take to change our own health truly do have an impact on changing the world. As more of us use our buying power to demand cleaner, safer foods, household products, cosmetics, etc., the market responds with companies stepping up to offer these. As such, the market shifts and the world shifts. While it can feel overwhelming as we consider the major environmental problems we are facing, and their impact on health,

**it is tremendously empowering to realize you can make a difference for yourself, those you love, and for everyone – simply by making one healthy choice at a time!**