

Hormones and your Health

We tend to think hormones only affect our mood, but the truth is our hormones play a critical role in the health of our bodies and minds every single day.

But what exactly are hormones and why are they important for our health? We'll translate some of the body's most important hormones and explain how changes in hormone levels can affect your body and your well-being.

What are hormones?

Hormones are special chemicals that transport messages through the bloodstream. After being made in one part of the body they travel to other parts of the body where they control how cells and organs do their work.

There are over 50 different types of hormones controlling a number of functions including metabolism, sleep, reproduction, growth, mood, body temperature and sexual health. Here are 5 of these important hormones and how they help you function.



and their role in your body



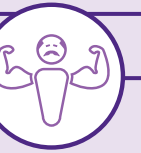
Oestrogen

Oestrogen is considered the female sex hormone, because it plays an important role in the development of a woman's reproductive system. Produced primarily in your ovaries, oestrogen regulates your menstrual cycle, maintains pregnancy, keeps bones strong and keeps your skin and nails healthy too. If you're depleted in oestrogen, you may have low moods or depression. When oestrogen levels fluctuate, as they do during menopause, you may experience hot flushes, low libido, and weight gain. The average length of time symptoms of the menopause last is around 4 years.



Melatonin

Melatonin is produced by the pineal gland in your brain, which contributes to your sleep and wake cycles. As the light of day becomes the dark of night, melatonin is produced from the brain as a response to the darkness to prepare you for sleep. Being exposed to light at night can block melatonin levels and affect your sleep quality. For instance, late-night exposure to the blue light of screens.



Testosterone

Surprisingly, this male sex hormone plays a big role for women too. Created in the male testicles and female ovaries it contributes to your sex drive, bone density and muscle strength. But when levels are too low it can cause low sex drive, decreased semen production, loss of muscle, and low bone density. There's also a difference between low testosterone and testosterone deficiency with studies suggesting that two in 100 men suffer from this deficiency. [Click here](#) to find out more on why this deficiency may occur in adult men.



Insulin

Insulin is known as the fat-storage hormone that lowers the level of glucose (a type of sugar) in the blood. It's released by the pancreas into the blood when the glucose level goes up, such as after eating. It makes it possible for your organs, liver and fat to absorb glucose, but if your body doesn't produce enough insulin or isn't using it well, blood sugar can build up and can put you at risk of [diabetes](#).



Cortisol

Stressed out? This hormone is released during times of stress, increasing heart rate, blood pressure, blood glucose, respiration, and muscle tension in response. It also temporarily shuts down the body's systems that aren't needed in the face of crisis, such as digestion and reproduction. While it's helpful when you need to be aware of imminent danger, consistently high cortisol levels can lead to anxiety, weight gain, migraines, heart problems, irritability, brain fog, and sleep disturbances. If your body makes too much Cortisol you may be at risk of developing [Cushing's Syndrome](#). Speak to your GP for advice on this.

What to know about hormonal imbalances...?

When they are in proper balance, hormones help the body thrive. But sometimes hormone levels are too high or too low. Vital to our overall health, hormone levels change as we grow and age. Knowing more about the role they play in our bodies can help you protect and manage your health.

There's a broad range of signs or symptoms that could signal a hormonal imbalance. Your signs or symptoms will depend on which hormones or glands aren't working properly.

Common hormonal conditions affecting both men and women could cause any of the following signs or symptoms:

- weight gain or weight loss
- a hump of fat between the shoulders
- fatigue
- muscle weakness or aches
- increased or decreased heart rate
- sweating

- increased sensitivity to cold or heat
- constipation or more frequent bowel movements
- frequent urination
- increased thirst
- increased hunger
- decreased sex drive

- depression, nervousness, anxiety, or irritability
- blurred vision
- infertility
- thinning hair or fine, brittle hair
- dry skin
- puffy face

Keep in mind that these symptoms are non-specific and having them doesn't necessarily mean that you have a hormonal imbalance.



What can you do to prevent or address an hormonal imbalance?



Contact your GP - There's no single test available for doctors to diagnose a hormonal imbalance. Begin by making an appointment with your doctor. It can be helpful to take a list of your symptoms and the timeline along which they've occurred. Bring a list of all medications, vitamins, and supplements you're currently taking.



Review your diet - A healthy and balanced diet with good nutrition prioritises your wellness by fueling your body with the nutrients it needs to help you be at your best. To find out more:

- Visit the Good Day at CUK [Nutrition page](#)
- Listen to a [Nutrition and Female Hormones podcast](#)



Avoid using harmful chemicals - Avoid using any products that contain harmful chemicals like parabens, DEA, propylene glycol and sodium lauryl sulfate. You should remember that your skin will absorb whatever you apply to it. Toxins in household and beauty products interfere with the function of hormones thus affecting hormone balance and health.

Begin by gradually switching your household products over to parabens free brands such as Ecover or Method and similarly each time you finish one of your daily personal products replace it with a brand that is free from hormone-disrupting chemicals.



Sleep - Poor quality sleep will cause hormones to spike as well as drop, altering hormone production especially our sex hormones like oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone.

- Find out more by visiting the Good Day at CUK [Sleep page](#)



Exercise and yoga can help you treat hormonal imbalance naturally. Exercise helps to regulate a number of hormones including oestrogen and cortisol, adiponectin (which helps with glucose and fat breakdown) as well as improving insulin sensitivity and stimulating the production of testosterone. In addition when we exercise, mood boosting hormones are released (notably dopamine and serotonin) so for hormone balance daily movement is a must.

- Find out more by visiting the Good Day at CUK [Move to Improve page](#)

Reduce and manage stress levels

- The first step toward reducing stress is learning how to manage it. Find out more by visiting the Good Day at CUK [Managing Pressure and Stress page](#)

Time to learn more

There is lots of information and support about our hormonal health and whilst we can't list them all, here are a few that you might find helpful:

An employee's guide to Menopause

We want to raise awareness of the effects of talking about it, looking at ways we can support our colleagues by talking about it openly and without embarrassment. It's something both men and women need to know about. [Click here](#) to find out more.

An education on Testosterone

Testosterone helps maintain many different essential functions in the body, but before we get into what it does we need to understand what it is. We want to support our colleagues with key insights into its function and the education required to understand the effects it has on the body. [Click here](#) to find out more.

What do my thyroid hormones do for me?

The thyroid gland is a vital hormone gland: It plays a major role in the metabolism, growth and development of the human body. You can also watch [this short film](#) to understand more about the function of your thyroid gland as well as thyroid disorders. [Click here](#) to find out more.

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) can cause various symptoms leading up to a women's menstruation cycle. Since we're all different, many women experience premenstrual syndrome in a different way. [Click here](#) to find out more.

Talking to someone about your own wellbeing can be difficult, but if you've noticed changes in the way you're thinking or feeling over the past few weeks or months that concern you and you'd like to talk to someone please consider receiving further support.



Polycystic ovary syndrome

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) often appears to be a collection of unrelated symptoms affecting the menstrual cycle, fertility, appearance, and weight. But when you put the puzzle pieces together, you can see not only how the symptoms relate to one another but also how simple lifestyle changes can have a positive impact on them. [Click here](#) to find out more.

Need extra support?

Fleet:

Visit the Medical Centre or contact your Crew Assistance Programme (CAP)

Shore:

Speak to your GP, Occupational Health or CUK Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)



Our **Mental Health First Aiders and Champions** can provide support and signpost you to additional help if and when you need it.

