

Ten-Point Tune-Up, Step 2: Hormonal Optimization

This article originally appeared on Vitality 101 with Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum.

In the first installment of my “Ten-Point Tune-Up” series (a ten-step method to energize every system and organ in your body) I discussed the importance of getting a good night’s sleep. In this installment, I’d like to talk to you about another must for vitality and good health: optimizing your hormones.

What’s so important about your hormones? To answer that question, let me ask a few others:



- Why are so many Americans fatigued, fat, and frazzled?
- Why do we get colds and other infections so easily?
- Why are so many of us depressed, anxious and irritable?
- Why is our collective sex drive stalled?
- Why do so many postmenopausal women feel like they’re also post-health (ditto for middle-aged men)?
- Why does pain claw at our bodies like a cat playing with a mouse?
- Why do so many of us die of heart attacks?

Every one of these common health problems, and many more, can be traced back to problems in the *endocrine system* – the endocrine glands and the hormones they produce (for instance ovaries and the estrogen they produce, and testicles and the testosterone they produce).

The typical problem with the hormonal system is usually *underproduction*: low amounts of one or more hormones. The most common deficiencies are thyroid, adrenal and sex hormones. (I’ll cover thyroid and adrenal in this blog post, and sex hormones in the next.)

The good news? Optimizing and balancing your hormone levels can optimize your health and well-being.

But don’t rely on your primary care doctor (or even a conventional endocrine specialist) to spot and correct a hormonal deficiency. They usually don’t! And that’s why I wrote this issue of the newsletter – to tell you about the many self-care methods that can help optimize hormonal function, and the medical options you can discuss with a holistic-minded physician.

Let’s make sure you get the hormonal tune-up you deserve!

Hormonal Optimization

Optimize Your Thyroid Gland

Located in the neck, the thyroid gland is your body’s gas pedal. It controls how fast or slow just about every part of you goes. The following list of symptoms are

common signs of an underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism) that isn't manufacturing enough T4 (the storage form of the thyroid hormone) and/or T3 (the active form):

- Fatigue
- Cold intolerance
- Painful muscles and joints
- Anxiety and/or depression
- Forgetfulness and poor focus
- Weight gain and difficulty losing weight, even when you don't eat much
- Infertility or miscarriages
- Heavy periods
- Hot flashes and other menopausal problems
- Dry skin and hair
- Thinning hair that's falling out
- Constipation
- Cold feet

Tests for hypothyroidism are notoriously unreliable and miss the large majority of those who need and/or would benefit from thyroid hormone! If you have one or two of the above symptoms of hypothyroidism you should consider being treated for the condition, even if your thyroid tests are "normal."

The best prescription treatment options include desiccated thyroid (a natural form of the hormone that contains both T3 and T4); compounded thyroid hormone (prepared by a compounding pharmacy); and Synthroid (if treatment with desiccated thyroid or a compounded drug doesn't work, I try Synthroid, a synthetic form of thyroid hormone).

Iodine deficiency is a recurring epidemic, and it is reasonable for those with the above symptoms to try supplementing with iodine 6.25 mg (6250 mcg) a day (I like **Tri-Iodine 6.25 mg**) to see if it helps. Iodine also supports breast health. Sometimes taking it for 3 months is enough to "fill the tank," allowing the amount in a good multi to be enough, where others prefer to continue it long term.

I also recommend a good multivitamin, such as the **Energy Revitalization System** vitamin powder, which contains thyroid-building treatments, like iodine (200 micrograms daily); selenium (50 mcg daily); and tyrosine, an amino acid (500-1,000 milligrams daily).

For a complete discussion of treatment options for hypothyroidism, please read **Thyroid Hormone Deficiency – An Overview**.

Optimizing Your Adrenal Gland

Famous for producing adrenaline (the hormone that triggers the fight-or-flight response) these two glands sit atop your kidneys. The outer section (the adrenal cortex) produces corticosteroids (hormones that help regulate your blood sugar, your immune system, your sex organs, and your response to stress). The inner section (the adrenal medulla) makes adrenaline, which readies you for sudden stress.

Symptoms of adrenal exhaustion include:

- Fatigue the first thing in the morning and during the day.

- Intense irritability when you're hungry ("Feed me now or I'll kill you!" is a thought you might have at those times).
- Frequent and lengthy infections (like sore throats and colds).
- Feeling dizzy sometimes when you stand up.

Strategies to optimize balance adrenal hormones include:

- Swear off sweets (except for chocolate). The highs and lows from eating sugar exhaust your glucose-controlling adrenal glands. I consider chocolate to be a health food though. My approach: sugar-free chocolate; so I get the best of both worlds. For sugar-free chocolates that will make your eyes roll up in the back of your head and leave you feeling like you've gone to heaven, check out the chocolates at **Abdallah Candies**.
- Cut excessive caffeine. Like sugar, excess caffeine forces the adrenal glands into action and eventual exhaustion.
- Eat more protein. Protein-rich foods include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, beans and nuts – all of which help stabilize blood sugar levels.
- Eat a little, but often. Five (or even six) smaller, high-protein, low-sugar meals a day are best.
- Drink more water, eat more salt. They help your adrenal glands regulate blood volume and blood pressure. Increase your intake to a level that feels good. If you're thirsty, drink. If you crave salt, add a dash of it to your foods.
- Take adrenal-supporting supplements daily. Good choices include adrenal extracts (200 to 500 mg), licorice (200 to 300 mg), pantothenic acid, or vitamin B5 (100 to 150 mg), vitamin C (150-200 mg), betaine (250 mg for methyl support), and tyrosine (250 to 1,000 mg). All of the above can be found combined in my favorite adrenal support formula, called **Adrenal Stress End**.
- Consider taking bioidentical adrenal hormones. I'm a great believer in correcting hormonal imbalances with bioidentical hormones – natural and exact replicas of the chemical structure of your own hormones. If diet and supplements don't clear up adrenal exhaustion, sit down with a holistic-minded doctor and discuss taking bioidentical adrenal hormones (cortisol and DHEA).
- Ask yourself, "Am I in imminent danger?" Viewing life as a constant crisis, and you as its victim, is a perfect way to wear out your stress-fighting adrenal glands. But asking yourself this one question when you are stressed can help you turn off your adrenal glands' fight-or-flight reflex, because the answer will almost always be *No*. You can relax. Meanwhile, when you start feeling bad, turn off the "news" networks. What they are playing (TODAY'S CRISIS!!!!) is generally a fiction meant to agitate you so you'll keep watching. When it stops being enjoyable (for me, that's about 10 seconds), turn it off. Your adrenals will thank you!

In the next installment in this series, I'll talk about optimizing testosterone, and optimizing and balancing estrogen/progesterone.