



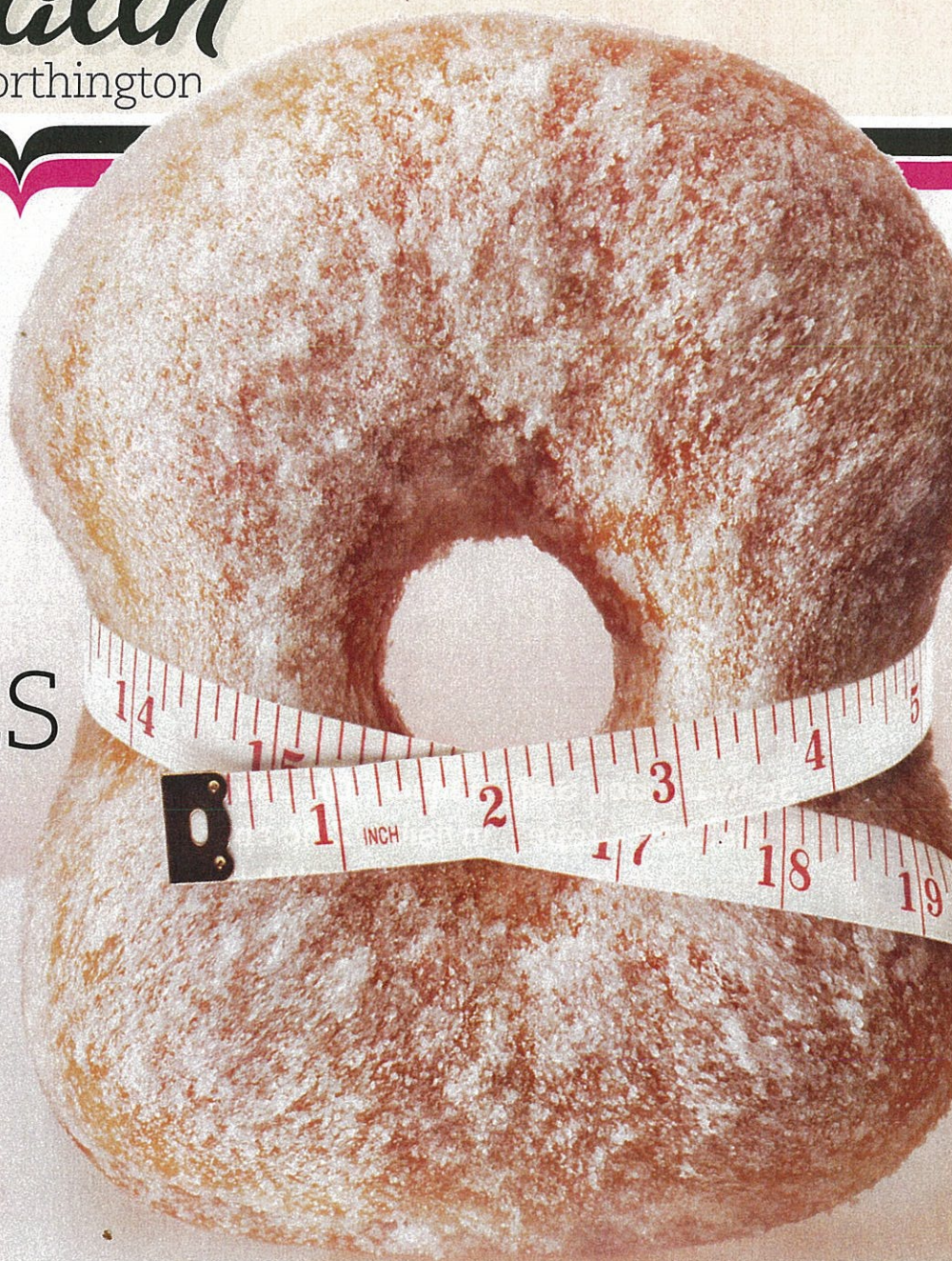
Health

Jane Worthington

EK!

ARE MY HORMONES MAKING ME FAT?

Sudden weight gain, mood swings and other unwelcome symptoms could be your hormones wreaking havoc



INSATIABLE HUNGER

If your stomach feels like a bottomless pit, it could be that the hormone cortisol has gone into overdrive and is creating non-stop food cravings.

"Cortisol is biologically programmed to help us cope with stressful flight-or-fight situations," says Brisbane dietitian Kate Di Prima. "In caveman days, a stressful event meant fighting a bison. These days our 'bisons' are more likely to be a cranky boss or a crying child.

"These situations still



require our stress hormones to react, but don't require the same amount of energy to burn off," she says. "But because your body is biologically programmed to think a stressful situation requires extra energy, you tend to refuel with food, usually carbs."

What to do

"Eating six small meals a day rather than gorging on three big ones will help keep your blood sugar on an even keel, as will eating a good breakfast in the morning," says Kate.

To distract yourself from food when stressed, try to conjure up the smell of eucalyptus. Studies show such sensual distractions can "break" a food craving.

Cushing's Syndrome is another hormonal condition which can cause weight gain, especially around the middle.

"Other signs are a round, red, puffy face, thin skin that bruises, frequent urination, high blood pressure, mood swings and irritability."

Dr Gino Pecoraro.

WEIGHT GAIN, ACNE, HAIR GROWTH, IRREGULAR PERIODS

"Unexplained weight gain, excessive body hair and acne can all be signs of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)," says Brisbane gynaecologist Dr Gino Pecoraro. "Other symptoms may include hair loss on the scalp and absent or irregular periods."

What to do

"See your doctor, as eating a low-GI diet may be advised," Dr Pecoraro says.

"Other treatments can include the Pill, to regulate menstrual cycles and improve acne and hair. The medication Metformin can also help with weight gain and reduce the risk of developing diabetes."

PCOS affects one in five women of child-bearing age, says the Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome Association of Australia. It's thought PCOS develops when ovaries react to excessively high insulin levels.

"Apart from often large and unexplained weight gain, some women with PCOS also seem to have a greater risk of developing insulin resistance, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and endometrial disease," adds Dr Pecoraro.

Dr Pecoraro adds that several other hormonal medical conditions are linked to unexplained weight gain, including hypothyroidism, (an underactive thyroid – symptoms include feeling cold, low energy, depression, dry skin and hair loss, and enlarged thyroid).

See your doctor if you're concerned.

MOOD SWINGS, BLOATING

More than 100 symptoms have been associated with PMS, or premenstrual syndrome. The week prior to a period can be a distressing time for many women, who may experience bloating, mood swings, irritability, insomnia and anxiety.

Hormones can also cause mood swings, as well as weight gain, during perimenopause and menopause.

What to do

Lifestyle and dietary changes, as well as medications, can help PMS.

"Exercise can make a difference, but some women have such severe symptoms they opt to take a very low-dose antidepressant, just in those few days of the month before a period," says Dr Pecoraro.

"Some women sail through menopause, but about 20 per cent will have severe mood issues.

"Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may help, especially with hot flushes and insomnia. Take it for the shortest period possible – between two and five years.

"There is some extra risk of breast cancer from HRT," Dr Pecoraro says. "But to put it into perspective, the extra risk means a 6.7 per cent chance of getting breast cancer at age 50, compared to 6.1 per cent for women who don't take it. Other risk factors, such as drinking, say, three glasses of wine a day, are a much greater risk factor for breast cancer."

AVOID THESE...

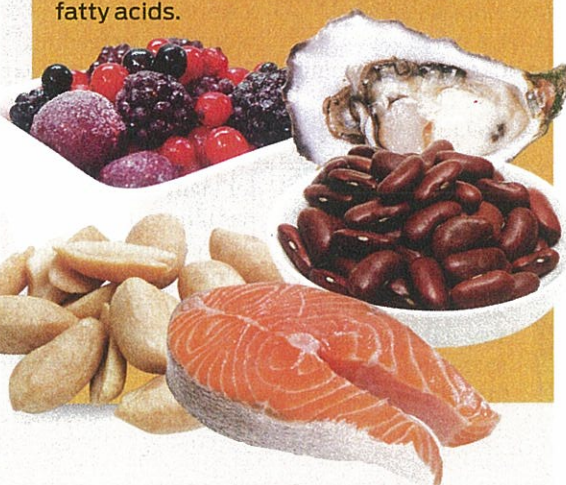
The following foods and liquids can wreak havoc with our hormones, says Melbourne naturopath Narelle Stegehuis.

- ✗ **EXCESS COFFEE** can put the adrenal glands into overload.
- ✗ **EXCESS ALCOHOL** is not good for fluctuating hormones.
- ✗ **SPICY FOODS and HOT DRINKS** can trigger flushes, as they raise your body temperature.

EAT THESE...

They are hormone-friendly, Narelle says.

- ✓ **BERRIES** are antioxidant-rich and may help counteract excess oestrogen.
- ✓ **NUTS AND SEEDS** contain phytoestrogens and essential fatty acids for hormonal support.
- ✓ **OYSTERS** contain selenium, to support healthy thyroid function.
- ✓ **LEGUMES** keep bowels regular, which removes excess hormones.
- ✓ **SALMON** can promote insulin balance due to protein and omega-3 fatty acids.



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