

Are hormones making YOU fat?

Is your diet being sabotaged by an undetected hormone imbalance?

Melanie Murphy finds out more

Broccoli – it's one of those vegies we dish up on the dinner plate not because of its tantalising taste but because we know it is good for us. It's the poster food for healthy eating as it's jam-packed with antioxidants and nutrients – you know the drill. But eating broccoli and other healthy foods may be sabotaging your weight loss efforts – if you have an undetected hormone imbalance.

Healthy hazards

"Different foods set off different hormone reactions in the body. Something healthy, for instance broccoli, has different components which may interfere with thyroid function. So if you have an underlying thyroid condition and have broccoli every day, then you're potentially making the condition worse (and therefore gaining weight)," practising naturopath and CEO of Mass Attack Narelle Stegehuis says. Other thyroid inhibiting-foods include brussel sprouts, cauliflower and cabbage. "Different trendy diets can also make an undetected hormonal imbalance worse. If you go on a high-protein diet and have a thyroid imbalance, you can make it worse," she says.

A common problem

If you eat well, exercise every day and still can't seem to deflate your spare tyre, then you may be in the 75 per cent of overweight women who have an undetected hormonal condition, which affects the thyroid, adrenal gland, ovaries or insulin levels. On average, women with this condition put on 2 to 5kg a year, according to Stegehuis. "It is heartbreaking really as these women are trying really hard and pouring loads of money into losing weight and are doing lots of exercising – which is fantastic – but they still can't seem to lose the weight. They don't deserve to be overweight as they have to work hard at maintaining their weight as it is," she says.

Common triggers

While hidden food sensitivities are one reason for hormonal imbalance, there are many other factors which can add to hormonal imbalance, such as the birth control pill, stress, pregnancy and childbirth. Even common foods such as margarine and biscuits can fuel hormone imbalance because of their trans fatty acid content. "Trans fatty acids are found in the food chain in the form of refined, processed foods or preserving

agents. They work as hormonal blockers – and contribute to hormonal disturbances in your body," Stegehuis says. Because trans fatty acids block your body's ability to use the good fats, essential fatty acids have to find somewhere else to go. Over time, more trans fatty acids block more cells – so new fat cells have to be built to keep them in – so you put on weight to facilitate this process.

growth hormone, less muscle is created, so there is less of an opportunity to burn the fat," says Stegehuis.

Holistic healing

Integrative holistic medical practitioner Dr Dzung Price says that today's environment exacerbates hormonal problems. "We're living in a toxic world now in the 21st century, full of chemicals and pollution which

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Mood swings

Trans fatty acids also contribute to an excess of insulin in the bloodstream, which results in hunger, low energy and mood swings. "You then have to eat, and you have to eat carbs to satisfy the hunger. The long-term effect is lots of carbs, lots of overeating, and an inability to generate growth hormone (which is only released in the absence of insulin). Without

have huge effects on our delicate hormonal balance. Even hair care products and personal creams and cosmetics can disrupt hormones in our body," Price says.

Lifestyle issues, poor nutrition, genetically engineered foods and everyday toxins have an accumulative effect in our bodies and we can't detoxify fast enough – meaning the body will store fat to protect itself against these toxins. "If there's a



Some of the problems caused by undetected hormonal imbalance are fibroids, PMS or mood swings, food or sugar cravings, weight gain, painful and irregular periods, low libido, fatigue infertility, Polycystic Ovarian Disorder and endometriosis.

nutrition

lot of toxic loading in the body, the body will try and deal with it to survive. It will hold onto fat and fluid to dilute the poison coming in," she says. "The other thing which causes hormonal imbalance is hidden bugs – candida overgrowth or bacterial fungus which we pick up easily in our environment and which overloads the body with more toxins, meaning it holds on to fat and fluids," Dzung says.

Treatment

So what's the solution to hormone imbalance? Unfortunately there's no simple one-size-fits-all answer, as hormone replacement is only a bandaid solution. Instead you need to find an expert who will examine and treat the underlying causes. Dr Price says she initially identifies all of the obstacles to achieving health, healing and an optimal weight and facilitates self healing. "I just try and remove all the things in the way of the body achieving health naturally," she says.

Dr Price systematically addresses the problems which may be causing weight to be retained, with hidden food sensitivities the first cab off the rank. "I look at what the person may be reacting to in their diet and environment and eliminate or desensitise them. Next, I look at hidden pathogens such as Candida and take that out of the picture, then I look at detoxifying all the organs. Cleaning all of the filters up in the body is important so the body has efficient elimination channels," she says. "In fact, the most important thing to look at is detoxification. If the liver is overburdened, it will not be able to assist in one's weight loss efforts. If it's overburdened it can't regulate insulin and

sugar levels and you have more problems with trying to burn fat as well." Blood, salivary and thyroid function tests are also undertaken as part of the process. If time is spent decontaminating and detoxifying the body, hormonal balance is often achieved without having to replace hormones.

"If someone is premenopausal I try and see if they can restore balance in their body themselves and create hormone balance themselves as opposed to replacing the hormones. It's a different approach," she says. "If you're treating the thyroid or progesterone and oestrogen imbalances, it's only temporary because you're not dealing with the reasons why they manifest in the body. You have to go back further and find what's causing hormonal imbalance. Sustainable weight loss is really only a side benefit of hormonal balance."

Stegehuis also applies a broad approach to assessing hormone imbalance. She takes a full profile of all of the symptoms and takes into consideration any diagnosed conditions. From there, she formulates a program for the client based on different foods and categorises them according to their hormonal profile. "As a natural medical herbalist I apply different individualised tonics to work on those areas identified. Different herbs have different properties such as improving insulin resistance," Stegehuis says. "It's not an overnight solution; this is actually about a lifestyle change and eating according to what a person's genetic composition is."

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