

# WHAT IS NATURAL PROGESTERONE AND HOW IT COULD BENEFIT YOU

By Jenny Birdsey

Regardless of your age, natural progesterone could possibly be the answer to your health problems!

It is proving to be the missing link for many women suffering a multitude of hormonal health and weight problems, as well as the symptoms experienced in the menstruating and non-menstruating years. In addition, for some so-called infertile women, it is also assisting pregnancies.

Let me first introduce myself and my area of work involving natural progesterone and women's health. I am a trained nurse by profession and the now recognised pioneer in Australia for natural progesterone advocacy. I have been actively advocating progesterone since my own discovery of its benefits 10 years ago. I have written two complete (companion) comprehensive guide books on how to use natural progesterone, and am a hormonal health and weight consultant full time in my own practice.

I am also the authentic owner and operator of the organisation called Natural Progesterone Advisory Network (NPAN) on which I own a world trade logo, and have single-handedly pioneered and operated this organisation from its infancy, since I registered it in 1998. Sadly there are copy versions, imitating my work and trying to make mileage on my credibility by taking the pseudo-name of Natural Progesterone Advisory Network or similar names. In other words, plagiarism.

The NPAN roots grew as a result of demand from lay women seeking via my advisory line help with alternative information regarding their health and hormonal problems. It also resulted from my own passion and persistence in spreading the news on what I had learned or discovered by accident about natural progesterone in my own search for answers to my own health problems. For years I battled with endometrioses (which was one almighty rollercoaster), even following my hysterectomy and induced menopause at age 40. My story can be read on my website, [www.jennybirdsey.com](http://www.jennybirdsey.com)

## WHAT PROGESTERONE IS

So what is this wonderful hormone called progesterone and where does it come from?

Progesterone is a hormone found in humans and other mammals (not plants) and produced by the ovaries (and testes in men) and in small amounts in some other glands such as the adrenal glands. It is categorised as a sex hormone, although it has numerous roles and functions other than its reproductive roles. It is sad that these other roles are not acknowledged or even recognised by mainstream medicine. Progesterone has been known mainly for its major function as the hormone of *pro-gestation*. Its name is derived from *pro* = *before* and *gestation* = *pregnancy*.

In nature, progesterone is made in the ovaries upon ovulation. Due to several

reasons, many women are no longer ovulating at the maximum capacity and producing a coverage of 12 – 14 days of progesterone from mid-cycle to end of cycle (the end is when a period starts). It opposes estrogen during this time, and more startlingly, there are many women who fail to ovulate monthly, hence the condition called *estrogen dominance* arises, in which too much estrogen is prevalent most of the cycle and progesterone deficiency occurs. This leads to estrogen dominance accompanied by a multitude of symptoms. [I deliberately use the American spelling, 'estrogen', rather than the British version, 'oestrogen'.]

## **ESTROGEN DOMINANCE**

Estrogen dominance is often compounded by excess toxic estrogens found in foods (for example, estrogen-laden chickens and grain-fed stock) and from our environment. Some of these estrogens are non-biodegradable and accumulate in fatty tissue and in the glands where hormones are produced. Consequently, this can further disrupt our endocrine system, creating hormonal havoc and cell-changing effects. These foreign estrogens are called xeno-oestrogens and are found in substances such as pesticides, herbicides, fertilisers, plastics, etc. They mimic estrogen in the body but are far more toxic.

Little wonder we are getting sicker and our immune systems are weakening, not to mention the impact this is making on our hormones and fertility. This may be one of the reasons we are seeing an increased prevalence of diseases such as breast cancer, fibroids, endometriosis, PCOS, menstrual problems and infertility in all ages. All these are increasing in the wake of estrogen dominance or progesterone deficiency. We are living in a 'sea' of estrogens.

To top off this chemical revolution and hormonal bombardment warfare, the high consumption of refined sugars, processed flours and other carbohydrates are increasing weight problems and thereby increasing the storage in fatty tissue of excess hormones.

Besides maintaining pregnancy and the production of other important hormones (it is a precursor hormone to other hormones, so is often referred to as the 'mother' hormone), one of progesterone's most important roles is to balance the effects of the estrogens. In fact, progesterone *opposes* estrogen. The message of estrogens to the body is to divide and multiply, whereas progesterone is a secretory hormone sending messages to oppose and balance.

In summary, the now recognised term, *oestrogen dominance*, describes a condition in which a woman can have deficient, normal or excess estrogen, but has little or no progesterone to balance its effects in the body.

## **SYMPTOMS OF ESTROGEN DOMINANCE**

The common symptoms of estrogen dominance (which I also like to refer to in many cases as signs of progesterone deficiency) can include:

- Infertility
- Postnatal depression
- PCOS (polycystic ovarian syndrome)
- Endometriosis
- Uterine fibroids
- Menstrual irregularities
- PMS or menopausal symptoms

These symptoms can manifest in a multitude of ways such as the following:

Sugar cravings, breast swelling/tenderness and ropey lumpy breasts, cyclic breasts lumps (fibrocystic breasts) and general fluid retention and/or bloating.

Hormonal cyclic acne, sinusitis, swollen vaginal glands (Bartholomew glands) prior to periods, and, for some, vaginal pimples like boils.

Cyclic headaches ranging to monthly debilitating migraines.

Irregular, painful heavy menstrual bleeding.

Menopausal symptoms ranging from hot flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, debilitating exhaustion, unexplainable weight gain and inability to shift fat (particularly around tummy, hips and thighs), uncontrollable mood swings, teariness, over-reactiveness / super-sensitive / paranoid, anxiety, panic attacks, inability to concentrate, non-clinical depression, lack of enthusiasm and vitality, foggy thinking, forgetfulness, tiredness, alienation, unwarranted insecurities, lack of confidence, lack of ability to multi-skill and job-task, and for many women withdrawal, general apathy and an overwhelming sense of aloneness.

Other common menopausal and pre-menopausal symptoms include:

Itchy crawly skin, stress incontinence, lowered or lack of sex drive (libido), dry vagina and associated problems such as painful intercourse, urinary tract infections (cystitis), thrush (which now may be chronic), vaginitis (itchy vagina), vaginal and clitoral atrophy (where the clitoris and surrounding skin membrane shrinks and sensation can be lost and entrance of the penis becomes difficult.

Hair loss or thinning of scalp and/or increased unwanted facial and body hair.

Cold hands, feet and, in some women, buttocks

Dry scaly skin and other skin problems such as acne rosacea, eczema and autoimmune disorders.

Dry, itchy, gritty or watery eyes.

Aching body, stiff joints and limbs, likened to arthritis, fibromyalgia and even chronic fatigue syndrome – all of which are easily mistaken diagnoses – or even deep hip pain of no apparent cause.

Decreased thyroid function as a result of too much oestrogen.

Deficiency of progesterone is implicated in breast cancer, ovarian cysts, post-natal depression and uterine fibroids. It also has significance in women (and men) with osteoporosis, post-mastectomy, hysterectomy and tubal ligation (sterilisation), and in men with prostate problems.

In summary, an overwhelming loss of self, in a bemused state of hormonal disruption and sense of no longer having control or connectiveness to self and one's life. A statement often relayed to me by women is, "I just want my life back". I have written an article on this subject which can be found on my website.

## **WHY IS THIS INFORMATION KEPT 'HIDDEN'?**

Thousands of women can relate to many, if not all, of the main symptoms mentioned above, and there are many more – far too many to list here. So why it is that mainstream medicine and most women never get to hear about this wonderful alternative that can possibly abate many of the problems we have to endure, often in silence for fear of being labelled a hypochondriac. We simply learn to put up with them and get on with our lot!

The reason why mainstream medicine has failed to adopt this form of treatment is because drug companies cannot patent (that is, own) this bio-identical hormone. To own it, they must alter the chemical structure because no one can patent something that occurs naturally.

This hormone can be produced in a laboratory by chemical conversion of the oils and fats (saponins) extracted from tubular plants, mainly soya and wild yam. These saponins are used because they have similar structures to our 'good cholesterol', and it is from cholesterol that our bodies make our hormones. This is an economical and efficient way to produce an exact replica of the body's progesterone, because these plants are economical to grow.

However, because drug companies cannot own this exact copy, they alter its structure to become other compounds (synthetic hormones) which they can patent. These altered drugs are known as *progestins* or *progestogens*. The best known is *Provera* (medroxyprogesterone), which is more potent than the body's own progesterone, it so produces some unwanted effects. Also, because it does not have the same configuration (molecular structure) as the real hormone, it sends different messages, resulting in many untoward side effects.

To add further confusion between the real and synthetic progesterone, many drug companies and some members of the medical profession refer to progestins as 'progesterone' or having progesterone-like benefits. In other words, many doctors believe they are using the natural progesterone, and fail to understand the differences in the way these two very different substances work.

The other reason for making synthetic progestins is to have drugs that can be absorbed when you swallow a tablet or capsule. Progesterone is best absorbed through the skin (topically) rather than by mouth, but most drug companies are not interested in hormones that cannot be made into a pill. It's really similar to the story of vitamin C. Drug companies cannot patent the actual vitamin, but they can market the version they produce, and can patent a delivery system.

The 'natural' progesterone that I am referring to has the same structure as the one that you make in your body. Some people call this substance *bio-identical progesterone*. It does all the things in your body that the hormone you produce does, whereas synthetic versions do not!

## **THE MISCONCEPTION OF WILD YAM**

Natural progesterone is often confused with wild yam, because, as I explained above, drug companies use wild yam extract (*diosgenin*, which is a saponin) as their precursor to progesterone. This has led some people to market wild yam extract as "natural progesterone", claiming it is the precursor to the progesterone in the body. However, it requires a chemical laboratory to do this conversion, your body cannot do it from diosgenin. Wild yam is a plant substance; it produces phytoestrogenic effects in the body, not the progesterone benefits.

## **HOW TO FIND NATURAL PROGESTERONE**

So you now want to go ahead with using natural progesterone! How can you get this hormone or other bio-identical-natural hormones?

Because progesterone is listed in Australia as an S4 poison, this means it is a prescription drug only. In other words, to get progesterone legally, you need a prescription from a doctor. Yes, this is the case, ridiculous as it sounds, considering this progesterone is a nature-identical hormone with no record of killing anyone! The drug-regulating authorities have put all the hormones into the same category – the synthetic and the bio-identical ones – hence the need for a medical prescription. The problem now lies in the fact that many doctors are resistant to prescribe. Why is this?

Mainstream medicine is blinded by trial results or 'evidence-based medicine', but unfortunately the evidence is funded by drug companies. As the drug companies cannot patent natural progesterone, they will not fund the trials. Consequently little is known about natural progesterone in mainstream medicine, so many doctors are reluctant to prescribe it out of fear of negligence, malpractice and/or peer pressure from 'respectable colleagues'. They choose to err on the side of caution, and also they may not be covered by their insurance if they prescribe 'untried drugs'. I call this conspiracy and blackmail from big-money influences, namely, the multi-national drug companies – say no more!

It is the courageous women who have rebelled against the use of conventional HRT and chosen to use progesterone that appear to know much more about its benefits than many doctors do. Healthy women do not return to their doctors to report better results and risk ridicule. Few doctors will endorse, let alone encourage, women in the use of natural progesterone, stating that such behaviour is, in their opinion, ridiculous, anecdotal or a placebo effect. They may also warn women that they are being irresponsible and could be jeopardising or endangering themselves because so little is known of the long-term effects. The truth is that in the USA, where natural progesterone can be purchased 'over the counter' without a script, women have been using it for over 20 years and continue to report long-term benefits.

This resistance and mindset has been an ongoing problem for the last 10 years since I started this work, and it appears that little has shifted in 'fossilised' thinking. I have also seen much political agenda and effort go into keeping this hormone from women. I ask myself if and how drug companies could possibly monopolise and overshadow the few trials that have been done, and I question their motives in women's health and the multi-billion-dollar drug company stakes. Imagine if they were to lose much of their HRT market!

## **IT'S ALL IN MY BOOKS**

To assist women in obtaining a script with the full co-operation of their doctor, I have dedicated a chapter in my first book to how to approach and work with your doctor. Furthermore, I have listed on my website a directory of compounding pharmacists who make progesterone and a link to a source of user-friendly doctors and other health practitioners (Australasian College of Nutritional and Environmental Medicine (ACNEM) of which I am an associate member), which will provide the names of holistic doctors in your area.

Although I provide a directory of compounding pharmacists, this does not necessarily mean that I endorse their products personally, nor do I receive remuneration for sales of progesterone cream.

There is only one progesterone cream manufactured by a drug company in Australia. It is produced in WA by Lawley Pharmaceuticals and is called *Pro-Feme*. The remaining progesterone creams are made by various compounding pharmacists throughout Australia and NZ. So be aware – even though they should all contain micronised real progesterone, creams can vary in performance and consistency considerably with each compounding pharmacist.

Progesterone, in my opinion, is one of our vital missing links to regaining and maintaining hormonal health and wellbeing. Each person is unique with a different hormonal and metabolic constitution. For this reason I have written 2 books, based on research, observation and my own experiential work with hundreds of magnificent women. The books are written in plain language and designed to assist women in

individualising their dosage and usage requirements.

Entitled, *Natural Progesterone The World's Best Kept Secret* and *Natural Progesterone More Secrets Revealed*, they cover every possible scenario so as to answer every likely question and help empower women back to health and wellbeing. These books cover dosages for specific conditions, correctional strategies, how to maximise hormonal and weight management, and how to reduce symptoms and incorporate nutrition so as to enhance progesterone's performance, healing and balance. The books are designed to be your manuals and to walk with you every step of the way in your journey, educating, informing and assisting you to return to your essence hormone, the known 'happy' hormone, and get your life back together again whereby you – and not your hormones – are in control.

## **THE AUTHOR**

Jenny Birdsey is a trained nurse, a hormonal health and weight consultant, and the owner of the Natural Progesterone Advisory Network. She is the author of *Natural Progesterone The Worlds Best Kept Secret* and its companion book, *Natural Progesterone More Secrets Revealed*.

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