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ADVICE

Advice - don't underestimate the power of the medicine you practice and, in particular, the power of herbal medicine to assist the body in regulating and balancing its own hormones.

The "bioidentical" hormone craze has put the false impression in people's minds that bioidentical = safe. I can't tell you how many people I've sat with in clinic who flat out told me they were told by a doctor or another healthcare provider that the hormones they were taking were safer because they are bioidentical.

Hormones are the MOST POWERFUL substances our body makes. Think about it. 75 millionths of a gram of T4 (75 mcg) can be enough for a hypothyroid patient to go from sick to "normal" for an entire day. Think about that. Every cell in the body gets enough T4 from that miniscule dose (I'm not advocating for Synthroid vs. Armour vs. X, just pointing out how little hormone is needed for the entire body to function).

We can serve our patients very well if they want to stop taking hormones by offering herbal medications which - in my clinical experience - can be incredibly effective. Can I explain exactly WHY they're so effective? No, I cannot. Do I have a receptor-by-receptor and chemical-by-chemical breakdown of how they are working? Nope, don't have that either.

But I have centuries of tradition behind me (in the form of Chinese Medicine). And, that tradition is ROCK SOLID.

And, I have the knowledge that herbs EVOLVED alongside us on this planet. Meaning that they speak the same evolutionary biological language that we do. For the geeks

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out there this might sound a little "wishy-washy", but I seriously believe this is how herbs work. They literally speak to our cells vs. commanding them in the way pharmaceuticals do.

OK, so let me illustrate one case where I saw some pretty amazing things using herbs in the place of hormones.

Before I do, I want to be clear. I NEVER tell my patients to stop taking hormones. I NEVER try to scare my patients about what they're doing. If they are OK where they are, I leave it alone. But if they ASK me, I'll give them my honest opinion.

And, I always make sure they know that stopping hormones suddenly can be very, very risky depending on the situation so any patient who wants to stop hormones I make sure to tell them to contact the prescriber to get instructions on how to discontinue.

OK, first case... 39 year old female with POF since she was in her late 20's. Had been taking estrogen and progesterone pretty much continuously since then, on a cycling basis.

When she came to me she had not been feeling well for a couple of years. Her hormone doses had been adjusted but she was tired all the time, sluggish, with no libido, and a high level of stress and anxiety.

She'd tried stopping the hormones a couple of times and would immediately experience severe menopausal symptoms. The textbook: hot flashes, night sweats, agitation, irritability, vaginal dryness.

I told her I could help her. First we'd start her on the herbs while she was taking the hormones. Once she was feeling better, she could consult with her doctor on how to stop them.

I gave her a combination of Er Xian Tang and Jia Wei Xiao Yao San based on her pattern. In addition she took B-Complex and a general antioxidant formula I use from Pure Encapsulations which contains both Zinc and Selenium (essential for proper ovarian and thyroid function among other things).

She started feeling the fatigue lift almost immediately and reported that her stress levels had decreased significantly.

She was very much in a hurry to stop the hormones so she asked the doctor and he told her she could just discontinue them at any time. Two weeks after starting with me, she was off the hormones.

This was where I was really paying attention. Would she have the severe menopausal reaction?

She didn't.

Not only did she not have the menopausal reaction, she continued to feel BETTER. Energy improved, mood improved.

A few weeks later she came in and mentioned her libido was coming back - after a couple years of almost no libido whatsoever. Also she was sensing her vaginal health was improved over where it was on the hormones.

About 8 weeks into our process, I decided to have her go get some bloodwork to see what was going on. She checked her FSH, estradiol, LH, and progesterone.

Not surprisingly, her FSH came back high - I recall it was around 60. BUT, her estradiol was 70. Every previous non-medicated test she'd taken for the past several years it was < 20.

And, the test result totally supported all the changes she was experiencing.

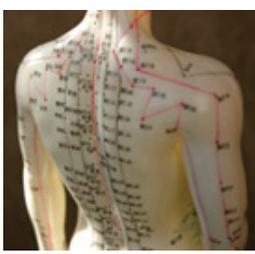
She's been my patient now for over a year. I still see her occasionally for acupuncture sessions. She's holding up very well. Feeling really, really good, and making tons of progress in school where she's studying speech pathology.

I'm awaiting the results of her next bone scan so I'll keep you posted on that. Even on the estrogen she was osteopenic/borderline osteoporotic. I have warned her about this and she is willing to take the risk to be off the hormones until she gets her next scheduled bone scan (due to insurance we could not get her a bone scan until this coming month).

The key point here is this: Follow the wisdom of Chinese Herbal medicine, and don't underestimate its power. At the same time, I strongly recommend against pushing patients away from hormones unless they bring it up. There ARE risks involved anytime people change their medications, and I believe the patient should be fully on board with those risks, not pushed or convinced into taking them.

Hope this helps!

Chris Axelrad, L. Ac., FABORM



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