

Estrogen Dominance and Fibrocystic Breasts

What is Estrogen Dominance?

Estrogen dominance is a term that refers to a higher than normal or imbalanced level of estrogens in the body. Increasing the amount of estrogens in the body also increases the possibility of the production of toxic estrogen metabolites (estrogens that have been metabolized through the liver into harmful forms). It is now well known that excessive estrogens from either or both internal or external sources and their harmful metabolized forms are strongly linked to breast and other hormone-related cancers. For this and many other reasons, it is critically important to understand how estrogen can become unbalanced in the body.

Where do the Estrogens Come From?

Consuming the standard American diet high in non-organic meat, eggs, and dairy products often causes or exacerbates this problem. Animals are often fed estrogens to bring them to market weight more quickly or to increase milk and egg production. Small amounts of these estrogens are passed on to the humans that eat the hormonal residues that remain in these animal products. Regular consumption of these foods can then contribute to the overall accumulation of estrogens in the body.

Estrogen is of course, also present in birth control pills and other hormone replacement therapy drugs. Individuals taking these prescription medications may also increase the hormonal load on the body.

Also, the liver plays a key role in the body's ability to metabolize hormones. The liver removes active estrogens from circulation, conjugating them and releasing them to the gastrointestinal tract for elimination. When the liver is overloaded with work to do, such as processing many hormones, emulsifying fats and cholesterol, removing toxins, pesticides, drugs, alcohol, and other substances from the blood, it may be unable to completely handle the full job of metabolizing estrogens. Additionally, when the bowels are constipated or under-eliminating, estrogens that have been conjugated by the liver for elimination are unconjugated in the intestine and reabsorbed, returning to the liver for a second or even a third time, adding further to the liver's workload.

Estrogens are also produced by the fat cells in adipose tissue. Excess weight, then, can also contribute to estrogen dominance.

Additionally, many environmental toxins have the ability to act like harmful estrogens in the body. These include pesticides, herbicides, plastics, refrigerants, and industrial solvents.

What are the Symptoms of Estrogen Dminance?

Excessive estrogens are linked to cancers of the breast, endometrium, ovary, uterus, and prostate. Earlier symptoms of estrogen dominance include PMS, endometreosis, uterine fibroid tumors, cervical dysplasia, systemic lupus erythematosus, and fibrocystic or painful breasts.

The build up of hormones in the body tends to contribute to cholestasis of the liver or the cessation of bile flow. This congestion in the liver impairs the overall functioning of the liver. As the liver ceases to complete all of its required workload, often there is an increase in toxic substances circulating in the body. One coping strategy the body can implement to counteract this problem is the formation of cysts. The formation of cysts in the breast or elsewhere, then, can be thought of as the body's attempt to remove substances it finds offensive from circulation. In this way, forming cysts is another way the body accomplishes the role of the liver when the liver is unable to fulfill all of its duties.

How Can We Reduce Estrogen dominance?

As you might guess from the discussion above, the most effective ways of reducing estrogen dominance include:

- Reducing or eliminating exposure to estrogens in foods and pharmaceuticals
- Improving liver function
- Improving bowel function

Reducing or eliminating commercially produced animal products and replacing them with a vegetarian diet or organically produced dairy, eggs, and flesh products are the best options for reducing estrogens from food sources. Also consider eliminating exposure to pharmaceutical estrogens.

The details of your unique needs for improving liver function are probably best addressed with your natural health practitioner. However, the following information will give you a good starting place for understanding how to best support your liver. For example, nutrients that are necessary for optimal transformation and conjugation of estrogen in the liver are:

- Copper
- Magnesium
- Zinc
- Vitamin C
- Folic acid
- Vitamins B2, B3, B5, B12

So it is important to ensure that your levels of these nutrients are adequate. Some herbs that help improve liver congestion include:

- *Silybum marianum* (milk thistle seed)
- *Curcuma longa* (turmeric)
- *Ceanothus americanus* (red root)
- *Taraxacum officinalis* (dandelion root)
- *Arcticum lappa* (burdock root)
- And many others

Choline, inositol, and methionine are also important support to liver function. These nutrients can be found in commercially produced lipotropic formulas. “Lipotropic” means literally “fat mover,” so these formulas help the liver to metabolize fats and remove them from the blood stream.

Bowels should move a minimum of two times each day. And there are many natural strategies for improving bowel function. Begin by ensuring that you have the “foundations” of good bowel health in place:

- Adequate purified water consumption. Use this formula to determine your optimal hydration levels: Divide your weight in half and drink that many ounces each day. Add to this number if you consume products containing caffeine or alcohol since they function as diuretics and cause you to lose water.
- Adequate fiber intake. Measure your fiber intake for one average day. You want to be consuming 35-50 grams of fiber each day. If you aren't, consider a fiber supplement.
- Adequate friendly bacteria. You may want to have your natural health practitioner evaluate your need for probiotics or friendly bacteria. But if you suffer constipation or diarrhea, the odds are that you will benefit from supplementing a high-quality probiotic formula containing such strains as acidophilus, bifidus, and others.
- Adequate essential fats. Most Americans eat lots of “bad” fats, but not enough “good” fat. Consider adding flaxseed oil to your diet. Contact your natural health practitioner to determine levels.

- Avoid white flour. Did you make paste in kindergarten? It was made of white flour and water. White flour essentially functions as glue in the intestinal tract, slowing the movement of feces tremendously.
- Vitamin C. Vitamin C is helpful and protective to the body for many reasons. One of its helpful roles is in bowel function. Discuss levels with your natural health practitioner.
- Know that there are many other options for improving bowel function. If constipation and/or diarrhea have been a chronic problem, you may find that you need a very focused, multi-faceted approach to restoring bowel health. Work with your practitioner to understand what's best for you.

Other Considerations

There are several other strategies that may be useful in your unique case. For example, movement of the lymphatic fluids can be greatly beneficial in reducing the workload of the liver and in reducing the severity of symptoms in fibrocystic breast conditions. Because the lymphatic system does not have its own pump like the circulatory system does, you must provide the pumping action for its movement through exercise. Therefore, it is critically important that you begin to include some level of daily cardiovascular activity in your regime. Walking is terrific to accomplish this goal. Rebounding on a mini-trampoline is also extremely effective at pumping the lymphatic system. Even 5 minutes each day is helpful, so try to find a level of exercise that you simply can't avoid.

Another strategy that is helpful for reducing lymphatic congestion in the breasts is breast self massage. You can actually help to move the fluid out of the breast by gentle rubbing away from the nipple. A good book on the subject is *Healthy Breasts* by Iris Ann Michael. Castor oil packs applied to the breasts and/or the liver are also helpful. Use the following technique:

- Saturate a cloth with castor oil. Apply directly to the breast or liver area. Cover first with a sheet of saran wrap and then with a small towel. Now apply a heat source (hot water bottle, microwavable moist heat pad, or electric hot pad) and allow to remain in place for one hour.

Essential oils can also be helpful to sore breast tissue. Thuja, rosemary, or chamomile diluted in a carrier oil such as almond or apricot kernel oil and rubbed directly into breast tissue can be effective. Use caution with any essential oil not to burn the skin.

Natural progesterone creams can also be helpful in raising progesterone levels that may be too low relative to the increased levels of estrogen. Saliva hormone assays are an excellent way to determine your levels. Discuss options with your practitioner.

Herbs that reduce estrogen dominance are also useful. Phytoestrogens may bind to hormone receptors in the body, including breast tissue, and compete with stronger endogenous estrogens. Phytoestrogens are much weaker in effect than circulating hormones, so when some of these plant compounds are in circulation crowding out the body's own hormones and taking up some of their binding sites, the overall negative effect of estrogen dominance will be reduced. Some herbs that accomplish this include:

- *Caullophyllum thalactroides* (blue cohosh)
- *Smilax officinalis* (sarsaparilla)
- *Cimicifuga racemosa* (black cohosh)

Some foods that also accomplish this include:

- Brazil nuts
- Soybeans
- Sunflower seeds
- Lambsquarter leaf
- Sesame seed
- Flax seed

- Pumpkin seed
- Spinach

A Possible Protocol for Reducing Estrogen dominance

Because each human is so bio-individually unique, it is always most helpful to work with a natural health practitioner that can help you understand your individual excesses and deficiencies. However, some basic concepts that you can practice yourself include:

- Eliminate sources of caffeine from diet: coffee, chocolate, black tea, green tea.
- Eliminate sources of commercial animal products.
- Eliminate pharmaceutical estrogens.
- Ensure bowels move at least 2 times each day.
- Supplement with a lipotropic formula. Typical dosage may be 3-6 pills per day.
- Supplement with choline and inositol. Typical dosage may be ½ to 1 gram of each per day.
- Supplement with vitamin E. Typical dosage may be 400-800 IUs per day.
- Supplement with flaxseed oil. Beginning dose may be 1 tablespoon per day in place of butter, cheese, etc.
- Supplement with B-complex vitamin. Typical dosage may be 2-4 pills per day.
- Supplement with magnesium citrate. Typical dosage may be 500-700 mg per day.

You may also want to consider the following recipe for tea. Combine the following herbs in equal parts and decoct 1 teaspoon of the mixture per cup of water. Drink 2-3 cups each day.

- *Taraxacum officinalis* (dandelion root)
- *Arctium lappa* (burdock root)
- *Berberis aquifolium* (Oregon grape root)
- *Rumex crispus* (yellow dock root)
- *Glycyrrhiza glabra* (licorice root)
- *Foeniculum vulgare* (fennel seed)
- *Citrus aurantia* (orange peel)
- *Zingiber officinale* (ginger root)

Remember, estrogen dominance is a serious threat to your overall wellbeing and longevity. Do not ignore the symptoms.