

Progesterone

Progesterone (P4) is the feel-good hormone. During pregnancy a ladies' progesterone levels rise and this is what gives some ladies that "glow." Similarly low levels of progesterone can make ladies appear lack-lustre, with no sparkle or glow.

Progesterone has many functions in the female body. These include:

- Assisting with fertility and maintaining the endometrium during pregnancy
- Decreases cramping in the uterus
- Down-regulates estrogen receptors
- Increases sex drive
- Promotes thyroid function
- Has a diuretic effects
- Helps decrease anxiety
- Decreases cell growth (and helps prevent cancer cells from growing)
- Promotes the enzymes that break down estrogen

High Progesterone

A lady suffering with high progesterone is quite unusual. I have never meet one or seen it in tests. If a lady has elevated progesterone levels, it is likely due to progesterone creams or bio-identical hormones or herbal extracts. Pregnant ladies usually have higher than normal levels of progesterone and estrogen.

Low Progesterone

This is a very common finding , especially when you take into consideration the ratio of progesterone versus estrogen. Progesterone levels will often be lower in the "stressed lady".

Symptoms include:

- PMS
- Problems conceiving and maintaining a pregnancy
- Anxiety, depression, self doubt
- Poor sleep
- Headaches, migraines
- Low sex drive
- Dry, lack lustre skin
- Lumpy or tender breasts
- Irregular or heavy bleeding with periods
- Breast and uterine cancer

Treatments

Focus on raising progesterone levels is essential if you have *estrogen dominant symptoms* or *progesterone deficient symptoms* (as outlined above). Ladies can feel quite transformed and so much happier, when their progesterone levels are restored.

Medically you can have progesterone implants, mirenas and oral contraceptive pill. However all of these are used to avoid falling pregnant. That is they are given to trick the body into thinking it is already pregnant. These progesterone based contraceptives are rarely used to correct a systemic problem of low progesterone. Progesterone tablets are prescribed by some doctors but have risks of blood clotting and other side effects.

Progesterone (as with any sex hormone) can be acquired in the “bio-identical” form. This means a doctor can prescribe progesterone for you in a cream or troche (jube like paste to place on your gums).

Herbs that increase progesterone levels are chaste tree, false unicorn root (which is becoming extinct) and peony. Vitamin B 6 and magnesium can help with PMS and period pains, but will not affect progesterone levels directly.

Stress reduction or management is a must for ladies with low progesterone. Stress leads to an increase in cortisol (made by the adrenal glands). The adrenal glands and ovaries manufacture progesterone in ladies. Cortisol and progesterone compete for the same receptor site on the cells. So, if you are making lots of cortisol (due to high stress), you will be effectively blocking out any activity your progesterone may have. Adrenal support and stress management will be discussed in the article on cortisol.