



# Hormone harmony

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*Ensuring your hormones are in balance can lead to a calmer and happier life. Charmaine Yabsley asks our holistic health experts how to achieve it.*  
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## 1. Create healthy flora

“Aside from exercises such as yoga or HIIT, you can influence your hormones through diet,” says Jayta Szpitalak. “Creating healthy gut flora mitigates inflammation caused by weak digestion. Probiotic-rich fermented foods like sauerkraut and kefir heal the gut and counter inflammation, which is the cause of many diseases, plus the healthy bacteria improve regulation of the hormones insulin, ghrelin, and leptin. Diets rich in omega fatty acids (think: fish, chia, flax), anti-inflammatory herbs like turmeric, leafy greens, and antioxidant-rich foods are all effective.”

## 2. Find the right mindset

Miranda Murray says, “Anxiety, stress and being in a constant state of fight-or-flight wreak havoc on hormones. Daily mindfulness and meditation practice helps to regulate your hormones, stabilise mood and allow you to move through your days feeling happier and more grounded on all levels.”

## 3. Cut back

“Hormone balancing comes down to diet,” says Fiona Tuck. “High-sugar, processed foods, drinks and snacks cause blood sugar swings and insulin imbalance, while refined and trans fats may interfere with cellular function and hormone production.”

## 4. Go for good fats

“Increase your intake of essential fatty acids from nuts, seeds, avocados and oily fish, like salmon,” adds Tuck. “Good fats are essential for healthy hormone production. Cut back on caffeine and alcohol: these stimulants cause an imbalance in blood sugar and affect liver function and detoxification. Increase fibre, particularly whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables. Fibre helps clear old hormones such as oestrogen, which can then be broken down by the liver and eliminated. Try yoga and meditation to help lower cortisol levels and manage stress.”

## 5. Make better choices

“Choose carbohydrate food options which are less processed and have a low glycaemic index (GI), because these digest more slowly and result in less insulin response,” says Chloe McLeod. “Legumes and whole grains like chickpeas, lentils and barley are great choices. High-GI soft drinks and lollies cause blood sugar spikes and then blood sugar crashes which may trigger over-eating. Eat lots of vegetables each day - five serves or more. Vegetables are nutrient-dense, satisfying, help regulate appetite, and provide the nutrition your body requires to work optimally. Get plenty of sleep, because inadequate rest increases production of leptin, the hormone that makes you hungry, and decreases grehlin, which is the hormone that makes you feel satisfied.”

## 6. Detox your beauty bag

“The average adult uses nine personal care products every day that contain a whopping 126 unique chemical ingredients, including nasty things like lead, sodium lauryl sulphate, aluminium, and artificial perfumes,” says Teisha Lowry. “When these are applied to skin, they penetrate into underlying tissue and eventually reach the bloodstream and wreak havoc on your hormones. Search the [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org) database for suspicious ingredients like 1,4-dioxane, parabens, petrolatum, benzene, and homosalate, which are possible human carcinogens and also linked to endocrine disruption,



developmental and reproductive toxicity, irritation, and ecotoxicity. The “Think Dirty” app is another great resource to have on your phone.

### 7. Balance blood sugar

“The hormone insulin is responsible for moving sugar from the bloodstream into cells, so it can be used as energy by the body,” says Simone Austin. “Insulin resistance occurs where insulin is not working very well, and so the body keeps pumping out more to try and control blood glucose levels; this can cause type-2 diabetes. To keep blood glucose levels balanced and therefore require less insulin to be released, eat a diet high in dietary fibre with slow-release carbohydrates, and low GI foods: whole grain breads and cereals, legumes and lentils, non-starchy vegetables, and rolled oats. Adding good fats, like olive oil, nuts, seeds and avocado, slows the release of the carbohydrate and keeps the blood glucose level down.”

### 8. Find harmony

“To cultivate balance between body and mind, include movement, stress management and nourishing foods in your daily plan,” says Antoinette-Louise Barnardo. “Some of the most important hormones are cortisol, which helps us manage stress, oestrogen, for reproductive wellbeing, and testosterone, for male reproductive wellness. Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and Brussels sprouts contain indole-3-carbinole, a powerful ingredient which keeps a healthy balance between 'good' and 'bad' oestrogen. Adaptogenic herbs help us adapt to stress: my favourite is *Rhodiola rosea*.”

### 9. Make a change

“Swap 25 grams of meat for 25 grams of plant-based protein foods - nuts, seeds, tofu and chickpeas - daily,” says Melanie McGrice. “I’m not suggesting women omit meat altogether as it’s very nutritious, but too much increases saturated fat intake which impacts the fluid surrounding your eggs. Add red kidney beans to mince meat, replace one latte per day with a soy latte, and introduce meat-free Mondays.”

### 10. Add antioxidants

“Environmental toxins and stress disrupt hormone function,” says Carolina Rossi. “Choose foods rich in antioxidants and nutrients which improve detoxification and decrease inflammation. Flaxseed is rich in phytoestrogens and can help improve symptoms of PMT, breast tenderness, painful and irregular periods: take two tablespoons of freshly ground flaxseed daily. Pomegranate increases glutathione, one of the most important

antioxidants for liver detoxification: take 30ml of unsweetened juice concentrate daily.”

### 11. Manage stress

“Consider the following for hormonal health: a clean liver, a diet rich in wholefoods, thriving adrenal glands, stress reduction, quality sleep, regular functional movement, and a calm mind,” says Sharon Kolkka. “You can balance your hormones by reducing alcohol, sugar and caffeine. Add yoga or Pilates, even just brief sessions, get plenty of fresh air, drink filtered water, and develop a positive outlook on life. For hormonal support, try acupuncture and herbal remedies and choose an integrative doctor with an interest in hormonal health.”

### 12. Use acupuncture

“Rebalancing hormones needs a multi-faceted approach,” says Keri Krieger. “A series of acupuncture sessions will support the liver and reduce cortisol and stress levels, which harm hormone balance; acupuncture will also work happily in conjunction with any other medical or herbal treatment. Reduce sugar and caffeine: without this extra load on the liver and digestive system, the body is better able to self-regulate and healing treatments can make a bigger impact.”

### 13. Try herbal medicine

“The herbs peony and dong quai have long been used in traditional Chinese and Western herbal medicine for treating symptoms of PMS, as well as irregular periods and period pain,” says Erika Morvay. “*Vitex agnus-castus*, or chaste tree, alleviates breast pain, tenderness and fluid retention, as well as hormonally-induced acne. *Tienchi Ginseng* is highly regarded for managing heavy menstrual bleeding and pain.”

### 14. Sleep deeply

“Sleep deprivation affects your cortisol levels for the entire following day, increasing inflammation and heightening stress responses,” says Emily Seddon. “It also impacts hormones that increase appetite - a plausible explanation for its association with an increased BMI. One way to help this is to cut back on coffee. A high caffeine intake (200-500mg per day) increases adrenaline and cortisol levels, which mimics our stress responses and can increase blood pressure and heart rates. A cup of espresso contains only around 100mg caffeine, so stick with one a day.”

### 15. Get your ommm on

“Meditation and yoga can help lower cortisol,” adds Seddon. “Known as the stress hormone, cortisol is produced in response to stress or danger. While this is a natural and helpful response in the short term, long term elevation of cortisol results in lowered immunity, high blood pressure, high insulin, and weight gain.”

## 16. Skip the sugar

"Sugar requires insulin for it to be utilised by the body, however excessive intake of fructose can trigger insulin resistance, increasing the demand for insulin production," says Seddon. "High insulin also provokes increased synthesis of androgens like testosterone. But don't avoid carbs: while a lot of sugar is not good for your hormones, whole grain carbohydrates are necessary, and restriction of both calories and carbohydrates can shut down ovulation and stop periods from occurring. Munch on a piece of whole grain sourdough or add baked sweet potato to your dinner. And don't forget magnesium, which helps control insulin production and can reduce sugar cravings. Have you ever noticed a craving for chocolate before your period? That's your body calling for magnesium!"

## 17. Maximise your meals

"Protein helps balance blood sugar and insulin levels; it's also required for the production and conversion of thyroid hormones and liver function," says Seddon. "The liver is where thyroid hormones are converted and activated for use, and excess hormones are metabolised. Eat lots of lentils: they are chock-full of fibre, which is associated with lowered oestrogen levels because it facilitates excretion of excess hormones."

## 18. Like licorice

"The combination of herbal licorice and peony has been shown to balance female sex hormones and reduce androgen production in women, which supports ovulation and a regular menstrual cycle," says Seddon. "Vitex agnus-castus has been widely used for the symptomatic relief of many female reproductive issues, including PMS and irregular periods. For a hot flush, consider hops: the phytoestrogens in hops extracts alleviate menopausal discomforts, due to an increase in oestrogen levels."

## 19. Go see your GP

"Hormonal fluctuations are often a natural part of your body's rhythm," says James Nevile. "If these fluctuations are causing symptoms that are negatively impacting your life, talk to your pharmacist or GP. Sometimes the solution is as simple as getting back into a balanced diet, including lots of fresh fruit and vegetables or getting active, but some cases might require more investigation and require medicines that help the body to get hormones back on track or replace what would have been produced naturally where the body isn't producing enough."

## 20. Stre-e-e-e-tch it out

"Regular stretching and yoga keep the heart healthy and oxygenate the body; they also reduce stress hormones and increase

## \* Meet our experts



**Jayta Szpitalak**, nutritionist and creator of Fermentanicals. [www.fermentanicals.com.au](http://www.fermentanicals.com.au)



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endorphins, mood-enhancing chemicals which help us cope better with stress," says Ali Cavill. "Yoga poses move fresh, oxygenated blood through your body, restoring it to working order and rebalancing the body to optimum health. Some exercises include; shoulder shrugs, neck circles, cat-cow, breathing sequences, standing leg stretches, camel pose." \*

## 21. Avoid pesticides

"Hormonal imbalances can be caused by nutritional deficiencies which trigger weight gain, fatigue, insomnia, and mood swings," adds Cavill. "The good news is that these negative effects can be countered by a well-balanced diet packed with nutrient-dense food and plant-based meals, such as poultry, fatty fish, cruciferous vegetables, and B-group vitamins. Choosing natural products and organic, phytoestrogenic foods is also important, because they don't contain the pesticides, herbicides, plastics, and chemicals that conventional food products do." \*

