

# Integrative Health Group Newsletter

August 2010

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## Want to make an appointment?

Integrative Health Group is open  
Monday - Thursday  
8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Friday  
8:30 a.m. - Noon

To schedule an appointment, call our office at  
(864) 235-6788.

## About Integrative Health Group

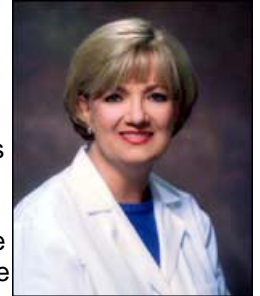


Our intention at Integrative Health Group is to profoundly improve healthcare in America. We are

## Letter from Dr. Stegall

### Hormones: What is a Girl To Do?

Conventional medicine typically has little to offer women suffering from symptoms of hormonal changes. The best a practitioner of traditional medicine has to offer is prescribing birth control pills to the teenager experiencing a painful period, followed by waiting until a female is "officially" in menopause and then prescribing synthetic hormone therapy. Females of varying ages come to my office with prescriptions - often unfilled - for some form of synthetic hormones, antidepressants, and/or pain relievers. None of them are being offered real solutions for a very real condition.



Especially with perimenopause, there has been a lot of disappointment among the majority of females with what conventional medicine can offer. In integrative medicine, we have recognized for a long time that a transitional period exists before menopause that is different for each woman. In knowing that, we have been able to assure females that fluctuating hormones can cause serious distress and the complaints are not "all in your head." What's more, the **correct natural protocol** is not only quickly effective, it is highly efficient in preventing the development of more serious conditions. By definition, the term perimenopause pertains to the transitional period of time that precedes menopause that is often symptomatic of hormonal imbalances and fluctuations in a woman's body.

### Exactly what are the symptoms of perimenopause?

Symptoms of perimenopause can begin as early as 10-15 years before menstrual periods completely stop. Women in their mid to late 30's, 40's, and early 50's may transition in and out of a perimenopausal state many times before they finally enter menopause. Common perimenopausal symptoms are:

- irregular periods
- heavy bleeding
- hot flashes
- sleep disruption
- frequent headaches
- dry eyes
- vaginal changes

**doing that by thorough assessments and follow-ups in order to individualize meaningful and successful health-building programs for each patient. We also feel that education is a powerful tool that enables an individual to make correct choices for improved well-being.**

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- hair loss
- weight gain
- loss of libido
- extreme emotional distress

Along with these more obvious changes, I have had a large number of perimenopausal patients to complain of short-term memory impairment and a lack of focus. These cognitive effects of hormonal imbalance are frequently overlooked in mainstream discussions about perimenopause. Such an oversight is strange to me because fuzzy thinking and difficulty with multitasking can definitely be traced to your physical state, as can increased anxiety, fatigue, depression, and drastic mood swings. These symptoms are signals the body is using to make you stop and take action. Giving birth is another example of a similar brain fog that occurs due to hormonal change, allowing the new mother only enough attention span to focus on her new baby.

A comparable phenomenon occurs with the hormonal fluctuations in the years leading up to menopause - except that now the haze of your hormone shift is telling you to stop and pay attention to yourself!

It may be comforting to keep in mind that a woman's body, mind, and emotions are always in a state of change, especially in the years that surround puberty and perimenopause. Just as a girl is pubescent as she enters womanhood, so is a woman perimenopausal as she advances into this latter portion of her reproductive life. Both terms are simply labels and are not to be considered a rigid definition of who this female really is, what her body is capable of, or who she is going to be when the hormones are once again regulated.

What are the hormonal imbalances that occur in perimenopause?

During this phase the ratio of estrogen to progesterone is in a state of instability. This can result in irregular periods or very heavy (and sometimes frightening) bleeding, in addition to many of the other symptoms. In the past ten years, most women tend to be operating with an internal hormonal balance tipped toward the estrogen side of the scale. I think this inclination is the result of several things:

- a lack of essential nutrients and fats, despite a large consumption of over-the-counter supplements
- a diet high in refined carbohydrates and low in quality protein
- chronic exposure to environmental toxins
- artificial hormones-through food as well as through various pills, patches, and creams, that result in endocrine disruption.

Prolonged emotional and physical stress, which I classify as anything that works against your state of balance, will surely upset the hormonal applecart. In today's frantic, disengaged, eat-and-run world, it is no shock to me that greater numbers of females are becoming my patients due to symptoms of premenstrual syndrome, infertility, fibroids resulting from hormonal imbalance, perimenopause, and menopause. Due to our exceptional results, the public is now aware that I specialize in endocrine

imbalance and neurotransmitter discrepancies for both males and females.

In many cases, women have low levels of progesterone in comparison to their estrogen levels. In other cases, the progesterone level is fine, but estrogen levels are high. Another pattern we are seeing more frequently is where all three of the key sex hormones - estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone - are low. What is most important to understand is that each woman needs to be evaluated as an individual by a medical practitioner such as I who is trained and experienced in integrative medicine.

More often than in the past I now find conventional doctors willing to discuss the reality of perimenopause, but natural, long-lasting solutions are not forthcoming. Most conventional practitioners have limited faith in their patient's ability to adopt healthier lifestyle and eating habits. My position is that I know and have seen that patients can and do make the necessary lifestyle changes to achieve their health goals. No woman needs to suffer with symptoms of hormonal imbalance at perimenopause, menopause, or after menopause. You can feel better, and you can start right now.

### **How long should I expect perimenopause to last?**

Being in perimenopause does not necessarily mean that you will follow an immediate or direct path into menopause. Some women persist for years in this transitional state, whereas others (although a minority) sail through in a matter of months. What seems to influence the severity of symptoms most is the weight of other burdens that a woman's body has been carrying over the years. Chronic stress, poor nutrition, and a lack of regular exercise are three major amplifiers, since they each play a significant role in the body's ability to detoxify and to maintain a state of well-being. Habits such as smoking or drinking to excess are likewise contributing factors.

Another hidden element of perimenopause is fear. Many women are terrified by the prospect of losing their biological fertility, just when stress and low testosterone may be thwarting their libido. Our youth-obsessed culture can be extremely hard on aging women. Many times the patient and I must identify and discuss the positives of this stage of life since only the negatives are usually associated with it by our culture. I have witnessed the dynamic transformation that regularly takes place in my patients. The joys of life after menopause are limitless, especially when you learn to address the symptoms with real natural solutions.

### **Exactly how do I help a patient achieve this state of hormonal balance?**

After helping so many patients with their hormonal issues, I understand firsthand women's frustration with the way healthcare is often delivered. With research suggesting that for the first time in history, our children's life expectancy might be shorter than their parents, the time is ripe to make some changes in the way we care for ourselves - changes that are not oriented toward drugs and not limited to what health insurance will cover.

I have found that a combination approach, one that takes into account all four corners of a woman's foundation of health, provides the real answers. I was among the first to emphasize individualized care in order to give women the basic tools necessary to navigate the confusing waters of perimenopause:

- optimal nutrition
- the correct supplementation for hormonal balance
- mindful exercise habits
- emotional support

At Integrative Health Group, we provide a large slate of lab tests, including hormone testing. We also provide bio-identical hormone therapy. By taking our practitioner-only supplements, our patients take important steps toward healing their bodies and restoring their natural hormonal balance. Practitioner-only supplements go through more rigorous testing than the supplements available to the general public. As a result, the formulation is more potent, allowing the practitioner to prescribe therapeutic doses appropriate for the individual that cannot be achieved with the store brands. This saves our patients a lot of money.

Once this experience has begun, our patients find the energy and motivation to make lifestyle and dietary changes that dramatically improve their quality of life. I receive many letters and notes from satisfied patients, describing how their care has transformed their lives and therefore their relationships.

Wherever you may be on your voyage through perimenopause or any other form of hormone imbalance, the symptoms you feel will ultimately influence your actions and reactions. You **do** have the power to help yourself during this time. We are here to help.

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*Alternatives* at AM 660 WLFJ every Tuesday afternoon from 12:30-1:00p