

Happy Hormones
FOR LIFE



MOVE



happyhormonesforlife.com

For hormone health it is vital to move. It's a no-brainer!

Exercise can:

- ✓ increase circulation – improving delivery of nutrients and oxygen to cells
- ✓ increases HDL (good) cholesterol
- ✓ support detoxification and elimination of waste material
- ✓ support bone health
- ✓ improve your mood by increasing endorphins
- ✓ improve immunity – better lymphatic circulation will help immune function
- ✓ reduce stress – although excessive exercise can increase cortisol, moderate exercise can reduce stress levels and help you sleep
- ✓ stimulate fat burning and increase energy
- ✓ improve lung capacity, increasing oxygen levels and reducing stress
- ✓ strengthen your heart and blood vessels

All of this is good for our hormones.

BUT.....When your hormones are out of balance, you have to be careful that you're not making things worse by stressing out your already stressed body.

Too much or too often?

Exercise is great, but often we get the message that more is better. It's not about pushing your body to exhaustion – excessive exercise actually stresses the body and raises cortisol! And cortisol wants to hang on to your body fat remember?

For women over 40:

1. Hormone fluctuations and imbalances (as are happening during your perimenopausal years) can deplete your energy stores, making you less able to cope with the demands of physical workouts.
2. Your body needs more rest and relaxation during this time than it did when you were younger.
3. Cortisol levels may have been high for some time, reducing your energy levels and depleting your body of essential nutrients such as magnesium, needed for muscle function, energy production, relaxation and mood – essential if you are exercising.
4. Your stress resilience and adrenal function may have reduced over time – and if you risk pushing your adrenals to a state of exhaustion over time. This can lead to 'adrenal fatigue' and if left untreated to more serious burnout conditions.

Too little?

Without activity, our muscles waste away, our fat stores go up, our circulation stagnates and we are at much higher risk of serious disease.

Sitting for long periods of time has become a way of life for many of us. A recent poll said we spend an average of 56 hours a week sitting down – in our cars, at our desk or on the sofa!

Our bodies are not designed to sit for this long. Scientists are studying this and have labelled the problem “Sedentary Death Syndrome”!

What is too much sitting doing to us?

- It slows down circulation, increasing your risk of heart disease & blood clots, and inhibiting nutrient, hormone and oxygen delivery to your cells.
- It increases the risk of depression – less blood flow to the brain reduces key neurotransmitters like serotonin
- It encourages fat storage – more insulin is released when your muscles are inactive, so more fat is locked up
- It increases insulin resistance and risk of diabetes – more insulin floating around means our cells can become resistant to it, eventually leading to diabetes.

What's right for you?

So too little and too much exercise can both be damaging to our hormones and metabolism. But everyone is different. We all have our own unique biochemistry, so there is no one generic formula – you need to determine the type, frequency and duration that is the ‘sweet spot’ mix that is perfect for you.

You need to find your own routine that:

- a. fits in with your life
- b. you actually enjoy
- c. energises you rather than depletes you
- d. you will keep up

It's important that whatever you choose you schedule it in to your diary every week, and make sure you stick to it.

General recommendations

There are some general recommendations that I would make based on my research and clinical experience that you may want to experiment with.

- **Cardio, aerobic, endurance activities**

eg walking, swimming, cycling, jogging, dancing

Anything that increases your breathing and heart rate. This type of exercise keeps your heart, lungs, and circulatory system healthy and improves your overall fitness. As your heart rate rises, it improves blood flow and oxygen delivery, activates your immune system and increasing your stamina. But there is a cut off point to these benefits, and if you do too much cardio it can do some harm by:

- Breaking down tissue and muscle
- Increasing cortisol, your stress hormone
- Making you more prone to injury
- Weakening your immune system
- Interfering with your sleep

Recent studies have shown that endurance sports like marathon running can put up your risk of cardiovascular disease by seven times! Long bouts of running can also increase inflammation. Clearly there are benefits from cardio type training, but too much can be counter-productive and even harmful.

You don't have to go crazy with the cardio. It's not the trendiest exercise craze, but I love walking!

Walking is incredibly beneficial. Here's why:

- You don't need a gym membership or equipment, just get up and go
- If you walk in nature, you get the added benefit of reduced cortisol (stress) and improved mood
- It's gentle on your joints, reducing risk of injury
- It's weight bearing, so reduces risk of osteoporosis
- It increases insulin sensitivity and blood sugar control (especially straight after a meal)
- It boosts your immune system
- It can clear your mind and allow ideas to flow
- It switches on genes that keep you healthy

- **Resistance or strength training**

eg lifting weights, squats, push ups, lunges, burpees, etc.

We don't have to train (or look) like a body builder, but by maintaining more muscle mass, it can increase testosterone and growth hormone. It's well known that men strive for this, but we don't always associate the importance of this for women. Testosterone is vital for sex drive yes, but also for heart, brain and bone health, and it can decrease rapidly after 40. Less muscle means reduced metabolism, and reduced testosterone. So working on keeping your muscles strong will help you to stay younger, sexier and slimmer!

- **Flexibility and core work**

It's so important to strengthen your core, especially if you've had children, or you spend a long time sitting down. Pilates and yoga are great for this.

Yoga is my favourite activity these days. It has so many benefits, including:

- **Mindfulness** – yoga is a great way to quieten the mind (you can only concentrate on one thing when you're in a difficult pose!), which helps to switch off your stress response and keep you in the moment
- **Breathing** – as well as being mindful, the focus on your breathing is hugely beneficial for balancing your cortisol and calming you down
- **Strength** – I never realised how strong you can get when you practice yoga regularly! Great to keeping up that muscle mass (see above)
- **Flexibility** – you don't have to be super bendy to do yoga, it's all about your own body and where you can take it. Increasing flexibility is great for your muscles and joints, and keeps you free of injury as you get older.
- **Posture** – strengthening your core and spine helps to improve your posture and mitigate the risks of too much slumping over your laptop! You'll be amazed at how much taller you can feel after a yoga or pilates class.

I recently met the lovely Wendy Powell, who has devised a hugely effective and successful programme to get your core strength back. Find out more about the MUTU system [here](#).

• **Burst Training or High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT)**

This type of short burst intense exercise has grown in popularity recently. That's because it's really great at increasing your testosterone and growth hormone, which helps to rev up your metabolism and burn more fat (in fact it claims to burn fat for 24 hours afterwards too!).

Studies have shown that regular HIIT can:

- Increase muscle and reduce fat
- Burn fat for long after your workout
- Increase insulin sensitivity and blood sugar balance
- Increase testosterone and human growth hormone

And the best thing is that it can be done in as little as 15 minutes!

Check out [this fab infographic](#) for lots more on HIIT.

• **Non-sitting**

One of the most important things to do is avoid excessive sitting. Try and interrupt your sitting as often as possible. If you work at a desk for hours at a time, set a timer on your phone or computer to remind you to stand up every hour. Take a quick walk or stretch, or do some squats! If you're driving for long periods, try stopping more often than normal for a stretch, or clench your muscles every so often if that's not possible. If you're on a train, try standing rather than sitting for part of the journey.

These are some ideas but finding your own routine that works for you long term will be the 'sweet spot' for your hormones.

Have fun!

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