

# Hack your hormones to LOSE WEIGHT

Rebalancing your hormones is a sure-fire way to lose stubborn kilos. Here, the expert reveals how

**B**een pounding the pavement and drinking green juice every day but still not seeing any results? Your hormones may be to blame.

Responsible for everything from controlling your appetite to energising your cells, hormones play a major role in how your body uses and stores fat.

When they're working well, these little messengers can help you shed excess kilos and help you maintain your goal weight, but when they're thrown out of whack – by your diet, training style or stress levels – they can stall or reverse your progress.

If you suspect you're experiencing a hormonal imbalance, keep a diary of your symptoms and make an appointment with your GP or naturopath. Although a single test can't assess all your hormone levels, a doctor will request diagnostic blood tests for any that might be out of order.

Once you have a better idea of where your body may need some help, get your internal chemistry back on track with these hormone-balancing tips from naturopath and Healthy Hormones co-author Belinda Kirkpatrick.

## CORTISOL

**WHAT IT DOES:** "Cortisol is one of your body's major stress hormones," explains Kirkpatrick. "It provides your body with energy in times of stress, but it also increases your appetite and slows your metabolism. If you have prolonged periods of stress – and prolonged production of cortisol – you're likely to experience weight gain [especially around your stomach] and have trouble shifting the kilos."

### HOW TO HACK IT

#### 1 RELAX

It's OK to say no to a social meet-up every now and then, and use the time to unwind and practise some relaxing breathing techniques, says Kirkpatrick. "You can't be in fight-or-flight mode when you breathe deeply, so when you're feeling overwhelmed, stop and take 10 deep breaths to activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which switches off that fight-or-flight feeling."

#### 2 DO LESS HIIT

High-intensity interval training can be an effective weight-loss strategy, but if you overdo it, the cortisol it produces can make your body cling to fat instead

of torching it. Instead, Kirkpatrick advises: "Supplement your tougher workout sessions with a rest day or more gentle exercises like walking and yoga."

#### 3 SWITCH TO DECAF

Too much caffeine can increase your cortisol levels, says Kirkpatrick. To keep your levels in check – and to ramp up your body's fat-burning abilities – swap your afternoon coffee for a decaf or herbal tea.

## TESTOSTERONE

**WHAT IT DOES:** "Testosterone plays a key role in muscle development and fat

suppression, so if your levels are low, you might notice you're not getting the muscle growth or weight loss you'd expect from your workouts," explains Kirkpatrick. Women with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) may have high testosterone levels, which can also lead to weight gain, so the key is to rebalance your levels.

### HOW TO HACK IT

#### 1 PUMP SOME IRON

Low testosterone levels can result in low muscle mass. To boost your production, Kirkpatrick recommends eating more protein and adding weight training to your

gym routine – especially if your current regimen is dominated by walking, running and other forms of cardio exercise.

#### 2 CHECK YOUR CONTRACEPTION

"The Pill suppresses the production of testosterone, and although this can clear up your skin, the drop in testosterone can also slow down weight loss," says Kirkpatrick. If you're packing on the kilos despite eating clean and working out, ask your GP for a blood test to determine your levels.

#### 3 LOAD UP ON ZINC

Zinc can normalise your testosterone levels by blocking an enzyme that converts testosterone into oestrogen. "It can also reduce the testosterone levels in women with PCOS without pushing it out of a healthy range."

## OESTROGEN

**WHAT IT DOES:** Oestrogen is vital for women's reproductive health and when it's too high, it can cause weight gain around the tummy, hips and bum. However, while high levels are an issue for pre-menopausal women, Kirkpatrick warns: "A drop in oestrogen in post-menopausal women can also contribute to weight gain." The goal, therefore, is to work to rebalance your oestrogen levels.

### HOW TO HACK IT

#### 1 AVOID EXCESS CHEMICALS

"Everyday items like perfumes, plastics and personal-care products can contain chemicals that mimic oestrogen and make your body think your oestrogen levels are higher," she warns. "To limit your exposure, try making the switch to natural cleaning and personal-care products, and avoid plastics."

#### 2 MIND YOUR GUT

"Oestrogen can be produced and metabolised in the gut," says Kirkpatrick. "So if you have an imbalance in your gut bacteria, your oestrogen production can be affected. To support a healthy gut, ensure you consume fibre from fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and legumes, and eat fermented foods."

#### 3 BALANCE YOUR PROGESTERONE

"Oestrogen and progesterone work like a see-saw," Kirkpatrick explains. "If you bump up your progesterone, it can help reduce oestrogen. You can do this by lowering your stress levels and boosting your intake of zinc and vitamins B6 and C, which are found in colourful fruit and vegetables, and oily fish."



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