

Commentary...

Oh, Dear. Must Be The Hormones.

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We blame the behavior of weepy women and macho men on too many hormones. Powerful stuff, those hormones.

But what's to blame for our own irrational behavior about hormones?

I'm referring to DHEA, the hormone of the hour. It's superceding melatonin and, if some people have their way, will itself soon to be overtaken by human growth hormone.

Supplemental hormones, if you've forgotten, are drugs. Potentially good, but also potentially nasty and very dangerous things.

We don't like ranchers adding them to our beef. And we distrust doctors who quickly foist them on patients.

But give us a few studies that promise hormones to be the elixir of a long life and we quickly forget all that. We suddenly become true believers and want to take them. Some of us are quite happy to cash in on them.

Does this sound hypocritical? I certainly think so. Especially when one of the biggest vitamin companies in the health food industry boasts about its "all natural" anti-steroid stance for body builders—while continuing to sell DHEA, the so-called "mother" of all steroid hormones.

Hormones...are very different from vitamins or minerals.

Have we gone nuts?

Aw, its just our hormones, dear.

Hormones, if I may remind you, are very different from vitamins or minerals.

Yes, they're all essential for health and for

life itself. And they all can give you a pretty good kick in the pants. Make you feel like a young buck all over again. Or a sexy little babe.

But hormones do one thing that vitamins and minerals and natural foods have never done.

Hormones can increase your risk of cancer.

...the hormone might stop some cancers. But it may promote others.

A few doctors, like William Regelson, MD, proselytize about DHEA's anti-cancer properties. But if you read the research, it's a mixed bag at best.

Some DHEA studies show that the hormone might stop some cancers. But it may promote others.

How do you know what it'll do in your body?

If you're taking DHEA on your own, it's a crapshoot. Completely unpredictable unless you have a detailed understanding of your metabolic pathways. And I doubt very much whether you have that understanding.

If you're a woman, DHEA might make your estrogen levels skyrocket—along with your risk of breast cancer. If you're a man, it could boost your testosterone—but a prostate cancer diagnosis could leave you feeling...limp.

So in the indiscriminate pursuit of the latest youth-in-a-pill, you might end up paying a very high price.

And leading DHEA doctors I've talked

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Must Be The Hormones...

Continued from previous side

with—like Regelson and Ray Sahelian, MD—are disturbed by how people have abused DHEA. Young people at the peak of their own hormone production supplementing with DHEA. Or people taking more and more, because if a little is good, a lot has to be better.

Sahelian, the author of *DHEA: A Practical Guide* (Avery, 1996), recently told me that he's now recommending *smaller* amounts of DHEA than he used to. He thinks too many people are taking way too much.

...most people are taking DHEA on their own. Some don't even realize it's a hormone.

To take DHEA the right way, you should work with a doctor. Get your baseline (starting) level measured. Then have your doc closely monitor your progress—and any undesirable changes. That way, you can reap the benefits and minimize the risks.

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As if DHEA doesn't pose a big enough ethical dilemma, some people are already pushing human growth hormone as the next remedy for growing old.

The problem is that the longevity claims for growth hormone are based on flimsy research. And, even more disturbing, there's compelling evidence that growth hormone has the opposite effect—that it actually shortens life span.

What a mess we're getting ourselves into. It reminds me that there's a good reason why a lot of drugs are available by prescription only.

My concern, however, is much more fundamental. Allow me to be your conscience for a few minutes.

I look around and get this chill that a big

chunk of the health food industry has been taken over by drug abusers. Vitamin companies and retailers are pushing hormones—once one of the symbols of everything we hated about conventional medicine and conventional foods.

...a big chunk of the health food industry has been taken over by drug abusers.

We've become our worst fear, our own worst enemy.

And in the end, I have only a couple of questions—really directed at people making or selling DHEA. Just how desperate are you to make a profit? And how eager will you be to sell the next drug?

Think I'm overreacting? You can blame it on my hormones.

But at least I didn't get them out of a pill. ☐

The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Nutrition Reporter's medical advisors.

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