

Podcast Episode #005

The Truth About Hormones And Why You Need to Care

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Announcer: Welcome to the Lift Your Life project with Coach Pamela.

Pamela: Welcome to the Lift Your Life project, I'm Pamela Mitchell, also known as Coach Pamela, and this is the podcast devoted to helping you meld your personal self and your professional self into an enhanced version of your best self.

My goal is to help you take control of your work and your life, feel more relaxed and confident, and experience the satisfaction and fulfillment of a sustainable, successful life. Yeah, all great stuff.

In today's episode, speaking of great stuff, we talk about the truth about hormones and why you need to care. Such a critical topic. To talk about that topic, I am thrilled to be chatting with Doctor Pamela Smith. She is the author of several books on health related topics including "What You Must Know About Women's Hormones," "What You Must Know About Memory Loss," and many, many others.

She's the director of the Center for Healthy Living and Longevity and the founder and director of the Fellowship on Metabolic Anti-Aging and Functional Medicine. She's an amazing woman and she's going to give us some really valuable insights on how hormones play a huge role in our everyday lives. Yes, it's true: how you can identify the signs of hormonal imbalance, plus she's going to share some practical tips for how you can level out your hormones and feel more energized, vibrant, and productive. We all want lots of that.

Tons of really great information in our interview today, so let's get this show started.

Welcome Doctor Smith.

Doctor Smith: Thank you for the invitation.



Pamela: You wrote a really interesting book that I had a lot of fun reading called, *What You Must Know About Women's Hormones*. What was really interesting to me is that a lot of the things that we think are a normal part of aging like gaining weight, or our memory loss, or even getting more wrinkles on our face are actually not just about aging, they're really a part of hormones. Can you tell us more about that?

Doctor Smith: Yes, and this is an issue for both men and women, so let's begin with women. We know that for women estrogen has 400 functions in the body, 400, that affect taste, touch, smell, hearing, skin tone. Estrogen for women even lowers cholesterol, blood sugar, blood pressure, it literally is memory for women, it helps with vision, weight, I mean so many things are controlled for women by estrogen.

As women age, estrogen in some women declines. The good news is the science is here to help us balance hormones and to also give the right estrogens so that they're safe. There's different kinds of estrogens. It's important that the right ones be replaced and they be put on the skin which we now know is a better modality.

Also very important for women is the hormone progesterone. Progesterone can be low at any age, it can be low with PMS, polycystic ovarian syndrome otherwise known as PCOS, it can be low peri-menopause, post-menopause, infertility. The good news is that one's fixable too. If progesterone is low sometimes people just need to eat better. Our hormones in the body for women and men both are governed by the nutrients that we have, so sometimes a multi-vitamin is helpful, and then sometimes we need prescriptions.

It's very important for women to have progesterone because without it they can have anxiety, irritability, insomnia, mood swings, depression, heart racing, bladder problems, gut disturbances, a lot of different things, but again it's a balance issue.

Same thing with testosterone. Women need testosterone. Too much increases the risk of infertility, heart disease, and diabetes later. Too little, women don't have strong bones and not as much self-confidence. Again, it's a balance thing and, interestingly, if testosterone's too high in women many of the treatments that work very well are not even prescription. It's just about looking at the balance in the body.

Pamela: You have listed three key hormones here, you've talked about estrogen, you've talked about progesterone, and testosterone, and there are so many different layers in this. I want to kind of dive into some of those layers. First, let's take estrogen because that's the one that we've all read about and back in my mother's day they would say, "Okay, just take your estrogen." Then all this news came out about how it really impacted breast cancer and things like that, and then it was like, "Oh no, you don't want



to take estrogen" and everything. So maybe you can tell us a little bit more about how science has evolved around estrogen and how we need to be looking at it today.

Doctor Smith: Absolutely. There are three estrogens that a woman's body makes: E1 estrone, E2 estradiol, and E3 estriol. We're going to keep it simple and just call them E1, E2, and E3. When women do need estrogen later in life we don't replace the E1, that one is linked to breast cancer. What we do instead is replace the E2 and E3. The E2 is the one that has the 400 functions, E3 has some functions but part of that is to literally help prevent breast cancer, so very important that we replace the right estrogens E2 and E3.

Pamela: Interesting, so then how should we talk to our doctors about that? Is that just something that we go in and we say, "Hey, you know, we just want to make sure we have this particular balance." Is this something that doctors need to specialize, are there specialists in this?

Doctor Smith: There are specialists in this field, they're metabolic medicine physicians, and really it's a personalized medicine approach where we very much look at how the body works in each person and then go back and look at balance. Let me give you an example.

One of my patients was low in progesterone and so when I asked her, "What do you eat?", she said for breakfast she had potato chips, for lunch, potato chips, for dinner potato chips, and guess what she snacked on?

Pamela: Oh my Gosh.

Doctor Smith: Potato chips. Literally that's all she ate, and so for her her progesterone was low because she needed nutrients to make that hormone. Within three to six months we had her eating a better diet, exercising, and taking a multi-vitamin and by the sixth month her progesterone came back to totally normal. For everybody it's really a different thing, it's a very personalized approach.

Pamela: That's really interesting. Basically then what I hear you saying is that when we start to notice shifts in our attention, in our energy levels, in who we are, that one of the things that we can investigate is our hormonal balance, not just assume, "Hey, the years are passing so therefore I just have to accept it."

Doctor Smith: Exactly, a lot of these things that you would call the aging process really are related to nutrients. They're related to how we eat, exercise, and hormones. If we go back and balance all those things really, honestly now, 60 is the beginning of middle age.



Pamela: Really? Wow! That's pretty amazing in all of this. You talked about some symptoms earlier and what was interesting to me is there are kind of the traditional symptoms of hot flashes, or memory loss, or night sweats, but then there were some things that really didn't seem to be traditional like anxiety, or at least these are things that we don't necessarily think are related to hormones. Maybe you could give us a list of the kinds of things that aren't traditionally associated with this but that we should be looking out for.

Doctor Smith: Again, another excellent question. When it comes to hot flashes et cetera, then only about 40 to 60% of women end up with hot flashes themselves, so they're not as common as you would think they are. But if you want to just look at the idea of symptoms of menopause themselves: hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, vaginal odor, mood swings, irritability, insomnia's a big one, depression, loss of sexual interest, hair growth on face, painful intercourse, urinary tract infections, weird dreams, vaginal itching, lower back pain, bloating, gas, indigestion, bone loss, pain in the ankles, knees, wrists, shoulders and heels. Our patients usually tell us that, believe it or not, their arthritis gets better when their hormones are balanced. Women can get hair loss, frequent urination, snoring, sore breasts, heart racing, varicose veins, urinary leakage, dizziness, panic attacks, skin feeling crawly, memory changes, as we mentioned anxiety, migraine headaches, weight gain. There's a lot of different symptoms. Some of these as you suggested like hot flashes we think of, but you're right, a lot of these women don't realize are part of what happens when hormonal dysfunction occurs.

Pamela: And we just think, "Oh, I'm changing," or we might not even be thinking to tell our doctors that we're going through these other things, so we spend a lot of time maybe thinking, "Well, I've got lower back pain, that just seemed to have started and, yeah, my skin feels a little crawly." We may not even think to mention those kinds of things because we don't relate the two.

Doctor Smith: I totally agree with you. In fact, usually when patients come in to see me, male or female, I have a list of symptoms for them to check off and almost always the patients are surprised, "Oh my gosh, is this really related to hormones?" Part of that is the fact that the hormones are literally a symphony and they all have to play in tune and the hormone cortisol which is our stress hormone is part of that symphony.

If the person is stressed at any age, men or women, then that plays into what happens with their male and female hormones.

Pamela: This list of symptoms, I mean your book is really great because it's very detailed in that, but do you have a separate list of symptoms that maybe we can include in the show notes that you can send to me and I'll just make sure that they're there for people to take a look at?



Doctor Smith: Absolutely.

Pamela: Great. Say more about cortisol because that is one and in today's world given all the "do more with less" and companies downsizing and so now we're having to take on the work of three different people, the level of stress in our lives has increased, psychic stress. Maybe you can talk more about this particular cortisol hormone and how it impacts what's going on in our bodies.

Doctor Smith: We measure cortisol, the stress hormone, by salivary testing and you actually have to have cortisol to live. If you don't have cortisol you die in seven days.

Pamela: Really?

Doctor Smith: The body will preferentially make cortisol above some of the other hormones and when we're first stressed, cortisol elevates but then it's supposed to come right back down. If we stay stressed and cortisol stays abnormal then we put weight on, thyroid, the body regulator might not work, cholesterol, blood sugar, blood pressure goes up, we might put weight on, the immune system becomes compromised.

It's interesting when it comes to memory. A small amount of stress actually helps focus the memory, but when it becomes this stress, then memory goes down.

Pamela: Since you said that cortisol spikes, it's meant to spike and then come back down but sometimes we have elevated levels of it, how do we know, how do we test? Is that something that we have to test over time or are there just levels, that once they hit a particular point, then we know, "Hey, we're in that red zone and we need to start doing something to shift it."

Doctor Smith: It changes over time, so it's supposed to re-balance itself many times during the day, but again, if people stay stressed all the time ... and part of that stress is over booking, people tend to over book which makes it really hard to have cortisol go back to normal and also it's a lot about mitigating stress.

Pamela: What can we do then to help our cortisol levels?

Doctor Smith: We can do a lot of things. First of all, the body does require nutrients for cortisol to be made. Most everybody needs a good multi-vitamin. The second thing we can do is mitigate the stress by laughing more. Laughing is really, really good for us, and believe it or not, studies have shown that crying also is great. It lowers cortisol and prevents heart disease.

Pamela: That is so interesting.



Doctor Smith: Those things are really important and when we mitigate stress, really. Many things that we think are stressful to us are really not as big as they could be. Go back and sort of re-look at that idea, was that really worth getting stressed over? If not, just laugh.

Pamela: I love that advice because basically what you're saying is that when we're in that red zone, when we're in the overload stage, that then all of the things that are there seem to be so much more. But when we can get a little bit of perspective and when we can drain our cortisol levels by either laughing or crying, which is great for the movie industry because we can just do it that way, that then we can have more perspective on the things that we're facing in our lives.

Doctor Smith: Absolutely, and just basic stress reduction techniques like prayer, meditation, Thai Chi, Yoga, Qigong, exercise, breathing techniques, they're all great.

Pamela: Those are great. Weaving those kinds of things into our lives. Those are really kind of activity-based prescriptions as I would call them. What kind of herbal therapies would you suggest? What kinds of other things that we can immediately do, say today, that would help our cortisol levels and even the other hormones that we might need to re-balance?

Doctor Smith: Certainly with stress reduction techniques we can use herbal therapies for abnormal cortisol. We can take calming herbs like chamomile and lemon balm. For most patients, they don't make them sleepy, they just take the edge off. So patients can go to a compounding pharmacy or a good health food store and find some nice calming herbs. There's also adaptogenic herbs, and that works for cortisol if it's too high or too low. Things like ashwagandha, ginseng, rhodiola, in fact, ashwagandha also helps with memory, so you get a two for one with ashwagandha.

Pamela: That is great. You talk in that about going to a compounding pharmacy, you mentioned a little bit earlier about this idea of customized medicine. Maybe you can talk a little bit more about this trend of actually creating something that really is meant to hit the things that matter to us, or that we need as opposed to going and just buying a bunch of different random supplements and having a different balance.

Doctor Smith: Certainly seeing a metabolic medicine specialist. Then you can have your amino acids, fatty acids, organic acids measured. You can have 35 vitamins in your body measured and then literally you know what you, and you alone need.

Generally most people do as adults need a multi-vitamin. Most people benefit from Omega-3 fatty acids, otherwise known as fish oil, but those need to be pharmaceutical



grade so they don't have mercury, and most people would benefit from a good probiotic, meaning good bacteria so that their gut works better.

Pamela: Those are things that we can just go to say a good health food store and get and just know versus just buying something off the shelf?

Doctor Smith: Absolutely. You can certainly use a search engine on the computer and you can find out where a compounding pharmacy is near you because they only carry pharmaceutical grade, but also really good health food stores carry both. They carry pharmaceutical grade and not, and people in those stores know which are the better products.

Pharmaceutical grade means that it's guaranteed to be bio-available, meaning it gets into your body and it does what it's supposed to do but also that it's guaranteed to be a 100% pure with outside verification by another company.

It's important that it be pure, and that it gets into your body and does what it needs to do.

Pamela: We now know to ask for pharmaceutical grade when we're in Whole Foods for example and looking at that huge shelf of all the different options that are in front of us. Let me ask you because that's one way that we can do this. How do we find a metabolic doctor?

Doctor Smith: Finding a metabolic medicine specialist is always a very interesting thing to do, you want to look for someone who is fellowship trained, so what I'll do is give you a website and people can go to that link and they can find a metabolic medicine specialist.

Pamela: Fellowship trained means what?

Doctor Smith: Means that they literally have taken a fellowship, advanced fellowship, and they can even get a master's degree in metabolic medicine. The more training the better because this a new field. So in other words you want to seek out a practitioner that did more than a weekend course, someone who literally has had ongoing training for years in this field.

Pamela: Usually then this will be a doctor that has another specialty like internal medicine, or OB/GYN, but then has on top of that gone in and done this type of in depth training to add to their core expertise?

Doctor Smith: Exactly.



Pamela: Do you ... and this just kind of a side question ... do you think that it's helpful to have more than one of your doctors be a metabolic specialist? So your internal medicine doctor and your OB/GYN?

Doctor Smith: Absolutely. Everybody needs a really good family doctor, whether it's an internist, OB/GYN, or family medicine specialist. But in addition right now this is a specialty field so having a metabolic specialist at any age even if you're 22, if you're 40, 60, or 80, can give you that extra look at how the body works so that they can personalize your care.

Pamela: Thank you so much for bringing that piece up, because again, traditionally we think, "Oh, if I don't start this by the time I am 50, or 60, or I'm already through menopause, is this something that can really help me?"

Doctor Smith: You can start this kind of therapy at any age. In fact, when people ask me, "When should you see a metabolic medicine specialist?" The perfect answer is before you're born.

We know that women that take fish oil, Omega-3 fatty acids when they're pregnant, their children have higher IQs and less learning disabilities.

Pamela: That's amazing. Oh my gosh, I could talk to you forever about this topic but we are hitting our moment where we need to move on. I want to ask you a final question about your own life. You've given us lots of strategies that we can immediately put to practice that will help us improve and lift our lives. But what do you do, Doctor Smith? What two strategies do you use that can help lift your life?

Doctor Smith: I'm age 60 and really honestly I feel about 37. I really travel around the world, I teach at the University of South Florida College of Medicine, now called the Morsani College of Medicine, and I also see patients and I speak to the public. I've written seven books and people will say, "Well that's a lot to do." You know what, it is, but again, 60 is very young and these are the four things that are key for everyone.

Number one, hormonally sound. Number two, exercise. Number three, eat as well as you can. Number four, make sure that you're taking the nutrients that are perfect for you.

Pamela: Clearly by everything that you manage to do, you are living your own prescription.

Doctor Smith: Everybody cheats now and again, probably my little cheat thing for me personally is a little bit of chocolate but that's okay, there's no person on earth that eats perfectly, it's all about balance.



Pamela: I love that, all about balance and all about bringing things into balance. Thank you so much Doctor Smith for all your great advice and information for us, we will definitely have to have you back on because there's all kinds of really great things you mentioned that we need to dive into. Thank you so much today.

Doctor Smith: Thank you.

Pamela: That was a fantastic interview wasn't it? I am such a total fan girl of Doctor Smith, I have to admit. For more information on her as well as to download the resources we discussed, like the list of symptoms that could be related to hormonal shifts, or a list of doctors that specialize in metabolic medicine, visit LiftYourLifeProject.com/podcast. Also while you're there you can download a full transcript of this episode so you can re-read some of that amazing information that she shared with us.

That's it for this segment of The Lift Your Life Project. If you have a question that you want me to answer during an upcoming segment of Ask Coach Pamela, visit LiftYourLifeProject.com/question and leave me a voice mail. If I answer your question in a future episode, I will send you a deck of re-invention cards as a gift. Get that done.

You can also connect with me on social media, on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, @TheCoachPamela. If you enjoyed today's episode please leave a review for the show on iTunes, your feedback does make a difference. Today's lift off inspiration comes from Herophilus ... say that three times fast ... and what he says is, "When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied."

Definitely why we want to keep our health. Thank you for listening today and remember, why settle for good when great is waiting? Take one small step this week to lift your life. Bye for now.

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