

What are Bio-Identical/Natural Hormones?

Are you experiencing menopausal related symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, anxiety, irritability, sleep disturbances, low energy, foggy thinking, vaginal dryness etc? Do you want to protect yourself or reduce your risk for chronic conditions (i.e. osteoporosis, heart disease, alzheimers, autoimmune disorders etc.) and/or want to slow down the aging process?

If you have answered yes to any of the above, you may benefit from our **Natural Hormone Balancing Program**. As described above, there are both short and long term benefits to bio-identical hormone replacement therapy (BHRT) or also known as natural hormone replacement therapy (NHRT). Having any kind of deficiency or imbalance in hormones can greatly affect the quality of your life. The key is to determine which hormones you are deficient in and/or what the imbalance is and then restore hormones back to respectable levels so you start to feel both better and younger. The goal is not to make you 25 or 30 again, but rather to improve your quality of life. Hormone balancing is much like trying to balance a teeter totter because if one hormone is relatively higher than the others, you are bound to experience some symptoms or side effects.

There is much controversy surrounding the use of hormones since the Women's Health Initiative study was stopped in 2002. This was a large study done that was suppose to demonstrate that *conventional* or *synthetic* hormone replacement therapy (HRT) like Premarin (conjugated estrogen) and Provera (medroxyprogesterone) was effective and safe for women's health. Instead the study was stopped early because it showed the direct opposite effects (i.e. increased risk of breast cancer, stroke, heart attacks etc.). In light of this, many doctors have taken their patients off these synthetic hormones and have left these patients with no options other than to suffer through with the "change in life."

It is important to identify the key differences between bio-identical and synthetic hormones, as most patients and even many health care professionals still do not understand these differences. With bio-identical hormones one is replacing hormones with the same hormone that your body is accustomed to. The definition of a bio-identical or natural hormone is one that is identical in every way to your body's own hormones. In contrast, synthetic hormones differ in their *chemical structure* from the bio-identical hormones. Because of these differences, the synthetic hormones do not work the same way as the body's "receptors" do not recognize the synthetic hormones to the same extent as the bio-identical hormones. The synthetic hormones act as "imposters" and attempt to mimic the actions of the bio-identical hormones, but unfortunately do not do a good job of it. The body also does not break down the synthetic hormones effectively and this can potentially lead to an increased risk for side effects (as seen in the WHI study) especially with chronic usage. As one can see, there are major differences here and we must not confuse the two.

At **Finlandia Natural Pharmacy**, our pharmacists can assist you with your hormone imbalance issues in our comprehensive **Natural Hormone Balancing Program** tailored to each individual. The program looks at the following:

1. lifestyle modifications
2. education regarding menopause/peri-menopause and the link with thyroid, adrenal and bone health
3. bio-identical hormones
4. vitamin/mineral/herbal supplementation
5. prescription drugs wherever appropriate for the shortest period of time

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Finlandia Natural Hormone Balancing Program (program details and fees)

The Finlandia **Natural Hormone Balancing Program** is aimed at improving your quality of life by helping you control any menopause/peri-menopause symptoms, slowing down the aging process and reducing your risk for chronic illnesses.

The first step is to complete a saliva test which will provide us with information on your current hormone levels. Saliva testing kits are available for purchase from our pharmacy. The saliva test measures the following hormones: estradiol, progesterone, testosterone, DHEA and morning cortisol. Other hormones such as estriol, estrone etc. can be included for an additional charge. Once the saliva is collected, the sample is sent to Rocky Mountain Analytical Lab in Alberta and the results are forwarded to our pharmacy 10 to 14 days later. At this point, the results will be discussed in an initial consultation with one of our pharmacists.

In the initial consultation, the pharmacist will collect information regarding your medical history (past and current), lifestyle habits, medication usage (i.e. supplements and prescriptions), personal health goals, symptoms etc. A set of forms will be provided prior to the consultation to help facilitate the process. The focus in this initial appointment will be to find a good starting point for the bio-identical hormones though it must be emphasized that lifestyle modifications and vitamin/mineral/herbal supplementation are the cornerstones for maintaining good health in the long run. While natural hormones may “put out the fire” initially (i.e. resolve or reduce the severity and/or frequency of symptoms), sole reliance on them will not maintain optimal health and well being.

It generally takes anywhere from 2 weeks to 3 months to see some effect from the hormones. For most women, the initial optimal dose can usually be determined within 4 to 6 months. In some more challenging and complex cases, it may take up to 1 year. It is important to keep in mind your hormone therapy may need to be adjusted from time to time depending on your symptoms as your condition can change with time.

Hormone balancing can be a fine art in terms of selecting the right hormones at the right dose for each individual. To tailor the therapy to your own unique needs, our program provides 3 follow-up appointments at approximately 2 month intervals. While some clients may initially require progesterone only, others may need multiple hormones (i.e. progesterone + estrogen + DHEA etc.) to manage their symptoms and reach their health goals. With hormone balancing, there is no one size fits all approach as each individual is unique. The clients who experience the greatest success are those who are highly motivated and are able to follow-up closely with their doctor and pharmacist. Our pharmacists can play a key role in helping you monitor your therapy and providing you information that complements your doctor’s advice. Our pharmacy firmly believes in patient education and has moved away from the traditional pharmacy practice which focuses more on product distribution. Our aim is to be more client focused and our pharmacists strive to help our clients achieve their personal health and wellness goals.

Program Fee: \$495 (regularly \$580 if purchased separately)

Includes: 1 saliva test, initial consultation (approximately 1 hour), 3 follow-up appointments (ranging from 30 minutes to 1 hour)

Any research necessary to carry out your appointment and making suggestions regarding your therapy is included in the above fee.

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Commonly Asked Questions

1. Do I need a prescription to buy bio-identical/natural hormones?

Yes, natural hormones require a prescription from a medical doctor. A pharmacist or naturopath who has some training in natural hormones can certainly make recommendations for you, but unfortunately are not able to prescribe or write a prescription. Some people might be purchasing natural hormones through the internet in the US. One must be careful if they are doing this because the quality of the preparation can vary widely. Quality control is not as tightly regulated as the preparations purchased through a compounding pharmacy and there is no monitoring or follow-up from any practitioner such as a doctor or pharmacist.

2. How effective are natural hormones? Do they really work?

Natural hormones are very effective if your practitioner has selected the RIGHT hormones at the RIGHT dose for YOU. In order to achieve this, it takes a little bit of time and patience and the client must work closely together with the doctor/pharmacist to obtain optimal results. What has worked great for your friend, co-worker or neighbour may not necessarily work for you. We have been very successful with the natural hormones and have seen a positive result with the vast majority of clients who have followed up with their doctor and our pharmacists on a regular basis.

3. There is so much controversy out there and I am confused. Are these natural hormones SAFE to use?

The honest answer is no one really knows 100% for sure but logically it makes sense as we are replacing hormones in your body with the same identical hormone. We do know that synthetic hormones (i.e. Premarin and Provera) if used long term can increase the risk of breast cancer, stroke and heart disease as shown by the results from the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study which was stopped early back in the summer of 2002. With the natural hormones we are not likely to have any significant evidence for its safety because there is no one (i.e. pharmaceutical company) out there who is willing to fund a large study because natural hormones can not be patented. Therefore, there is no incentive for any drug company to carry out such a study. The intuition or logic behind natural hormones is if your body's own hormones did not harm you back then and had a protective effect on your health.....why would they harm you now when you need them the most? One can wait in vain and suffer through with the "change of life" or the other option is to educate yourself about bio-identical hormone replacement therapy so you can make an informed decision.

4. Do I have to enroll in the pharmacy's program in order to get suggestions on what I might need for bio-identical hormones? Can I just do the initial consultation? Why is there a program fee?

Yes, a client can choose to just come in for the initial consultation and our pharmacist can make some recommendations. However, this makes following up with the client very challenging. As mentioned earlier, comprehensive follow-up is vital to the success of the therapy. There is an exceptional amount of care put into each aspect of the program, and the program fee helps to sustain this level of service. From our previous experiences, clients who enroll in a program such as ours are far more likely to be successful than those coming in for a single consultation. We have done our best to make the program as affordable as possible for our clients by offering an \$85

reduction in the overall program fee. The initial consultation will give us a good idea on what you might need for bio-identical hormones and an opportunity for our pharmacist to address any questions/concerns you may have regarding the therapy. It also serves as a session to get to know you better as a client and what factors you may have in your environment that can be affecting your hormone levels. There is not enough time in 1 hour to discuss other very important issues such as vitamin, mineral and herbal therapy in detail. These topics are generally the focus in the 1st follow-up appointment along with re-assessing your hormone therapy. The success of your therapy will be dependent on how motivated you are in getting better and also how carefully you can adhere with the treatment plan that is suggested. Maintaining your body and well being is much like keeping your car properly tuned and running smoothly. Do you wait until your car breaks down and end up spending a lot to fix it or do you bring it in to the shop at regular service intervals to prevent major repairs?

5. Are medical doctors open to bio-identical hormones?

The bad news is that most traditional medical doctors have limited knowledge with bio-identical hormones as it is not considered mainstream therapy. Most doctors also consider testing for hormones medically unnecessary. The good news is there are more and more doctors open to this therapy today and wanting to learn more about it as bio-identical hormones are gaining wider acceptance. Bio-identical hormone pioneers such as Dr. Jonathan Wright and Dr. John Lee have greatly raised this awareness amongst health care professionals and Suzanne Somers has done a brilliant job of raising awareness amongst the public. With the recent exposure on OPRAH along with Dr. Christiane Northrup, it is likely that more doctors and women will become more aware of the potential benefits of bio-identical hormones in the future and the positive impact it can have on a person's health.

6. If my own family doctor is not open to bio-identical hormone therapy, do you know of any other doctors that can help me out?

Yes, we do know of several doctors who are open to bio-identical hormones. Depending on what level of care and service you are looking for, we can refer you to the appropriate doctor. There are medical doctors in the lower mainland who have extensive experience, training and knowledge in this area of natural hormones. These doctors are all in private practice and thus can spend a considerable amount of time with their clients and provide you with great care. However, their services are not covered through MSP. If you have the resources, we highly recommend this as the first option for anyone looking to using natural hormones. For those who choose not to go this route, there are other doctors who will be covered through MSP. The drawback is these doctors have much less time to spend with a client and therefore the service will not be at the same level as the private practice doctors. Finlandia pharmacy can assist you along the way and provide you with guidance and advice that will complement the doctor's management plan.

Finlandia Natural Pharmacy and Health Centre

1111 West Broadway

Vancouver, BC

(604) 733-5323 extension #2

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