

# Balancing act

*Oestrogen dominance – when there is an excess of oestrogen in the body – is something to be vigilant about, as it can cause dire consequences if left unchecked.*



**O**ESTROGEN dominance can occur for many different reasons. Increasingly, however, the reason is a plethora of synthetic xenoestrogens, oestrogen-like substances which have infiltrated our environment and disrupt natural hormone balance by stimulating oestrogen production in the body. They're difficult to avoid, hiding in plastics (yes, even BPA-free plastic and plastic wrap), herbicides, pesticides, the Pill, fertility drugs, paints, detergents, toiletries, coloured paper products, spermicides, and more. Even natural oestrogens, such as those found in milk, pose a health risk as farmers keep dairy cows pregnant to increase lactation.

Another culprit behind oestrogen dominance is stress, because cortisol (a stress hormone) and progesterone (a sex hormone that helps us hold onto a pregnancy) share a metabolic pathway in the body. When we're under a lot of stress, our bodies will favour cortisol production over progesterone production, which stems from the time when having a quick burst of energy in order to run away from a predator was more important than making a baby. Unfortunately, the constant onslaught of stress we often feel in 2016 means cortisol is gobbling up our progesterone at an alarming rate and creating a high oestrogen-to-progesterone ratio - and thus oestrogen dominance.

## Cause for concern

The problem with oestrogen dominance is that oestrogen's main function in the body is of growth. When unopposed, excess oestrogen overestimates the breasts and reproductive organs, causing fibrocystic breast disease, endometriosis, cysts, PMS, uterine fibroids, infertility, endometrial polyps, PCOS, autoimmune disorders, low blood sugar problems, menstrual pain, and breast and ovarian cancer. Often a sluggish liver inhibits our ability to excrete excess oestrogen, causing harmful oestrogen to accumulate in its most toxic forms, oestrone and oestradiol, which are linked to breast and endometrial cancer.

Nat Kringoudis, founder of Melbourne women's health clinic, The Pagoda Tree says excess oestrogen not only increases risk of reproductive issues and certain cancers, but also plays a major role in a bumpy transition through menopause. "Women should be able to transition through menopause much more easily than most do," says Kringoudis. "Menopause should take a year, and if your body is healthy menopause shouldn't shut you down. It's never been an issue until modern day living. We can set ourselves up to transition

through menopause smoothly, but many women don't because their hormones are out of balance."

Kringoudis says the number one symptom indicating someone has oestrogen dominance is when they have ovulation or 'mid-month' pain. Other symptoms include bloating, increased blood pressure, irritability, hypoglycaemia, sugar cravings, allergies, depression, infertility, abdominal cramps, migraines, breast tenderness, constipation, weight gain, low energy and mood swings.

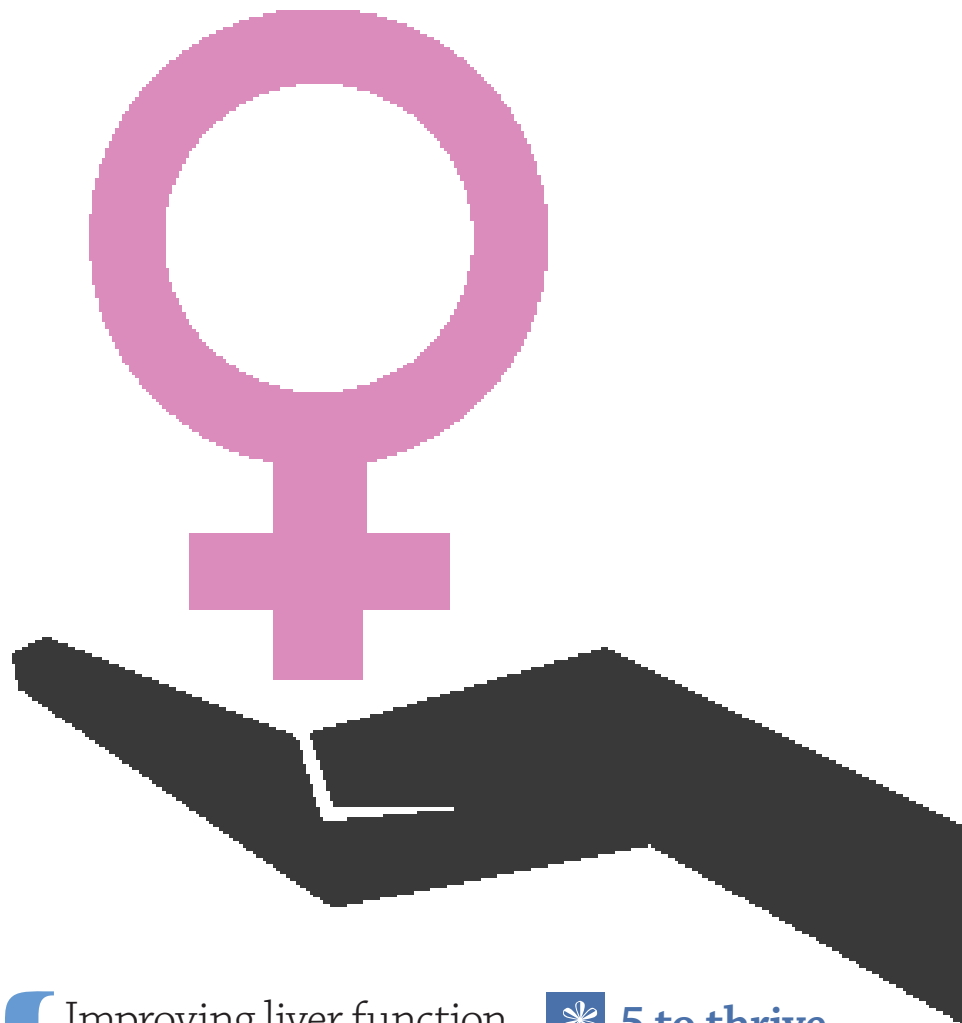
### The good news

Happily, there are many things you can do to give yourself the best chance possible of avoiding oestrogen dominance, and diet and lifestyle are key. "It's not what you do in your doctor's office," says Kringoudis, "it's what you do day to day that makes a difference to your hormones. For starters, eat a diet high in fibre. The body eliminates excess oestrogen via the faeces and fibre increases our excretion rate. Plus, microbes in the gut have more time to create harmful oestrogen-like substances if you're constipated."

Minimising gluten or anything that's going to stress the body is important. "We don't necessarily associate poor food choices with being stressful," Kringoudis says, "but your body knows that something is stressful to digest, which adds to the problem. Meat proteins also play an important role in balancing hormones. If you're doing well on a vegetarian or vegan diet, that's fine - everyone's different. However, there are amino acids and other substances found in meat that aren't found in anything else."

Other foods that are helpful are phytoestrogens, natural oestrogen-like plant substances that compete with dangerous oestrogens in the body. Good sources include flaxseed, alfalfa, apples, parsley, seaweed, cruciferous vegetables, and legumes. Avoiding xenoestrogens is important too, so eat organic food, avoid the use of plastic containers and plastic wrap, use glass whenever possible and never drink from plastic water bottles. Consider a liver cleanse (monitored by a healthcare practitioner), and abstain from substances that stress the liver, like processed food, refined sugar, alcohol, preservatives, and drugs. Eat more liver-friendly foods, including beetroot, carrots, artichokes, lemons, dandelion greens, watercress, burdock root, onions, garlic and leeks.

Supplements can also be beneficial for anyone with oestrogen dominance, including indole-3-



Improving liver function is vital because the liver clears oestrogen from the blood.

carbinol (I3C), di-indolymethane (DIM), and sulforaphane. Research shows these compounds break down cancer-causing forms of oestrogen to non-cancer-causing forms. Kringoudis recommends a high dose of magnesium and chaste tree berry (vitex) to support healthy progesterone-to-oestrogen levels. She also insists we must always ask why we're low in certain things, instead of simply supplementing without looking at the root cause. "You have to be aware of what's driving the problem of excess oestrogen, and it is stress. The hardest but the most important part is learning to manage stress. Getting enough sleep is crucial too, because the body rejuvenates overnight and inadequate sleep results in decreased melatonin, a hormone that opposes oestrogen. Abstaining from alcohol is also highly beneficial: if oestrogen dominance is a problem, as little as two glasses of wine a week will influence your oestrogen levels in the wrong way." ✨

### ✨ 5 to thrive

1. Get 50g of fibre every day. An easy way to boost fibre intake is to have a teaspoon of psyllium in water, three times daily. (Be sure to drink plenty of water, otherwise psyllium can be constipating.)
2. Ensure you get eight hours of quality sleep each night. Exercise regularly and lose weight if necessary. High body fat will convert DHEA, a sex hormone, into oestrogen.
3. Take a daily probiotic that is enteric-coated and has a minimum CFU count of 25 billion.
4. Eat your seaweed! It's full of iodine, which positively modulates the effect of oestrogen on breast tissue. Without iodine, breast tissue is more sensitive to oestrogen stimulation, which can cause cysts, fibroids and tumours.
5. Cut down on coffee. Caffeine has been linked with higher levels of oestrogen.