**The Key to Overcoming Stubborn Weight Loss**

**By Dr. Ramona Warren**

Have you tried multiple weight loss diets, but nothing seems to work?

Do you have cravings you just can’t seem to control?

Has your body seemed to change its shape -- with bulges and “pooches” you never had before?

Are you constantly tired and drag through the day?

Do you want to exercise but find it hard to find the energy?

Weight loss is top of mind for many people, but can easily become a frustrating battle. Why can weight loss be so difficult? The issue is a matter of focus. Stubborn weight is not the “problem,” but, rather, a “symptom” of an underlying issue – typically a broken metabolism resulting from hormone imbalances. In order to successfully lose weight, we must first fix the metabolism by balancing the body’s hormones.

Hormones are chemical messengers produced by endocrine glands and released into the bloodstream. There are many different hormones in the body and the blood carries these hormones to various areas where they affect body function. When any of the endocrine glands are not working properly, weight loss can be next to impossible.

We can get clues about our own hormonal balance by looking at the shape of our body. Our body shape is determined by certain hormones that cause fat to deposit in specific areas. When these hormones are out of balance, we see a distortion in body shape. There are four main body shapes resulting from imbalanced hormones: the ovary shape, the adrenal shape, the thyroid shape and the liver shape.

The ovaries mainly produce estrogen and progesterone. When the ovaries become dysfunctional, it can result in increased fat production or fat storage in the hips, thighs and lower abdomen. This is what is known as the “ovary shape,” or the traditional “pear shape.” The most common complaint from this shape is the frustrating “pooch” just below the belly button.

The adrenal glands, are walnut-sized glands that sit on top of each kidney. They are often referred to as the “Napolean gland,” because although small, they affect many different systems in the body. When the body is under stress (a common condition in today’s world) , the adrenal glands will increase cortisol production, which causes fat to be stored in the abdomen, and the belly can sag and hang.

Thyroid hormones work to control the metabolism. If the thyroid is sluggish, many body functions can slow down. The result is often fatigue, fluid retention, hair loss, dry skin and weight gain. The thyroid body shape tends to gain weight all over. Even a mild thyroid issue can have significant effects on the body and is often secondary to an adrenal problem.

The liver is the body’s primary “detoxifier” or “filtering system.” It plays a major role in metabolism and hormone function. If the liver is toxic or becomes damaged, it can result in the liver body shape. The liver body shape has a “pot belly” appearance. Men tend to have this body type more than women.

It’s important to note that fat itself is an endocrine gland that produces estrogen. An increase in fat causes an increase in estrogen levels, which continues to keep hormones out of balance. Men who carry “big bellies” produce a significant amount of estrogen, which can impact their testosterone. Some of these men have higher levels of estrogen than women, which can lead to male breast cancer and other issues.

How do we balance our hormones and get the weight off? Observing your body type is just the beginning. Hormones are complex, and most people have a combination of imbalances. These are the steps I take when working with patients to regain hormonal balance:

1. Always start with your food. Much of what we eat contributes to hormone imbalances. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, said, “Let food be your medicine.” By eating REAL food and staying away from packaged, processed foods, your body will become healthier. We want to eat foods as close to their natural state as possible, and preferably organic, free range, grass fed and wild caught. There are many pesticides and herbicides that mimic estrogen and these can create hormonal imbalances. Sometimes, a purification program to reduce and eliminate excess hormones is needed.
2. Exercise is important, especially to combat the insulin resistance that contributes to carb cravings. Resistance training and interval training yield the best results. You don’t have to spend hours exercising. Longer and harder isn’t always better.
3. Using specific nutritional supplements to support the endocrine system will often help restore balance to the hormones.
4. Often we will use questionnaires and order lab tests, such as saliva testing and hair analysis, to determine imbalances and the extent to which the metabolism is “broken.” We can then use the results as a guide to restoring health and tracking progress.

When hormone balance is restored, our body can finally begin to release the stored fat. Hormones hold the key to effective weight loss and optimal long-term health.