

Estrogen Dominance and Brenda J.

I've had a lot of female problems since I was very, very young. My first child was born when I was 17 years old. Paul was born a severe quadriplegic with cerebral palsy. When I was 18, my second child was born and died after three months. At 22, my daughter, Sandra, was born. She was normal but very, very tiny: three pounds. All of my children were born prematurely.

When I was 23 I had to have a complete hysterectomy. I had fibroid tumors, and one night I went into a very severe hemorrhage and was taken to the emergency room where doctors performed the hysterectomy.

Estrogen replacement was recommended by my gynecologist after the hysterectomy. I was told I would need to take estrogen for the rest of my life, since my body no longer produced it.

As soon as I began taking Premarin I felt that something was wrong. I just didn't feel right. I told my gynecologist about this feeling and I suggested it might be the estrogen. But he told me that wasn't the problem and that I had to be on estrogen. That was when I began gaining weight.

For the first five years after my hysterectomy my only symptom was this gradual weight gain. But then other symptoms began appearing. I began feeling fuzzy in the head. My vision started to blur, I wasn't sleeping well and my joints started hurting.

When my first gynecologist retired, another doctor took over his practice. I tried talking to this doctor too, telling him how I felt. But he had the same response to my complaints as the first doctor. In fact, he thought my symptoms indicated that I might not be getting enough estrogen and he increased my dosage. This doctor put me on Synthroid, a thyroid drug, and kept increasing the amount of Premarin I was taking, so that by the time I was in my 40s I'd been taking 2.5 mg, the maximum dosage of Premarin, for 10 or 12 years. The gynecologist would explain away my depression by saying, "Of course you're depressed. You have a handicapped child. You had a child that died. Your depression is normal."

I got divorced in my 30s, and about a year after the divorce my physical problems started in earnest: the aches and pains, the fuzzy thinking, the deep fatigue, the headaches, and of course the 14 bloated body, which got worse every year. I honestly don't know how I managed back in those days after the divorce. I was so exhausted all the time I didn't know which end was up.

A typical day would start with my getting up and my body hurting so badly that I would get into the shower and stand under the hot water until I could bend my arms and legs and move a little. Then I would get dressed and I was already exhausted. But somehow I'd do my work; you just do what you have to do.

During this whole time I tried getting second, third, and fourth opinions about the Premarin from various gynecologists. When I moved to Lake Arrowhead, California, I tried a gynecologist there. This doctor told me to keep taking the Premarin and that the only problem I had with weight was that I had to stop eating so much. I told him, "I don't eat. I starve myself to death and I exercise until I fall on my face and almost pass out." He said, "Well, I never saw a fat woman in a concentration camp." I got so mad I got up and walked out of his office. Shortly after that I read about this program at Duke University where you could get a total medical workup. I flew to Raleigh, North Carolina, and entered the program. I filled out endless forms and had blood tests and a hormone panel and all kinds of testing done. I lived there for six weeks and spent almost \$20,000.

At the end of the whole thing they told me there was nothing wrong with me and that I should go home and visit a psychiatrist. It was the same old song: you've had a hard life, you're stressed out, keep taking your Premarin and see a counselor.

The doctors at Duke University increased my dosage of Synthroid and put me on a high-carbohydrate diet. I was eating bagels and fruit in the morning, pasta for lunch and dinner, and now I started really bloating out. My metabolism was slowing down even more. I have photographs of myself from this period, and it takes my breath away to look at them. I was so huge! I was a size 14.

I developed a new symptom. I started having disoriented moments when I'd be on the freeway and I couldn't remember where I was going or why I was there.

The turnaround came when I talked to a woman who was having some of the same problems I was having—achy joints, weight gain, puffiness, fatigue. We'd commiserate with each other, blaming it on our age. "Getting old isn't what it's cracked up to be," we'd tell each other. I didn't see her for about four or five months, and then one day I was out walking my dog and ran into her. I hardly recognized her. "My God, what are you doing?" I asked. She told me about Dr. Platt, and I went to see him the following week.

The first thing I noticed about Dr. Platt was that he really listened to me. Most doctors don't hear you, but Dr. Platt makes you feel like you're talking to your best friend. He did my hormone panel and told me he was taking me off Premarin. My first reaction was shock. All of my life doctors had been telling me that I needed estrogen replacement. I thought, "Maybe this isn't going to work." A few times I'd tried to wean myself from Premarin, and the hot flashes and headaches were unbearable.

And the way he was telling me to eat! Meats and vegetables, bacon and eggs for breakfast—it went against everything the culture was telling us about cholesterol and everything else. But at the end of our first meeting he said something that made me trust him. He said, "None of this is your fault. You've just never received proper treatment."

So I started taking progesterone, two different thyroid hormones, and eating what he told me to eat. I was eating meat, eating eggs, eating three meals a day. I never ate so much in my life. And the results happened so fast I couldn't believe it. I could just see the weight dropping daily. And my energy shot up. I don't ever remember feeling the way I started to feel. I felt wonderful and happy and energetic.

I can't even describe it, it all happened so fast. I was thinking clearly, my vision cleared up, my headaches stopped, I started sleeping at night. In about a month I had to buy a new wardrobe. I immediately got rid of everything in size 14. I went down to a size 4 in two months.

The aches and pains started going away gradually. At six months I realized that my arms didn't hurt. I could get up in the morning and move my arms.

By this time I felt so great that my new husband couldn't keep up with me. I had more energy than he could handle. So he went to see Dr. Platt, and he got amazing results, too. He's 11 years older than me and has always been very healthy, but now he feels like 40 again.

When I see friends, they're shocked at how well I look. They think I've lost 90 pounds (I've actually only lost 47 pounds). My vitality is unlike anything they've seen in me before.

You know, when it comes right down to it, it isn't even the difference in how you look ... it is how you feel. I wouldn't give up how I feel for anything.