

Natural Progesterone Cream (NPC) or Gel

Progesterone is one of the two hormones produced by the ovary, the other being estrogen. It is synthesized during the last half of the menstrual cycle after ovulation. It balances the effects of estrogen. Prescription medications such as Provera and birth control pills contain a man-made chemical similar to the progesterone made by the ovary but different. This “difference” is responsible for the many side effects of these “progestogens” such as fluid retention, increased tendency to clot, liver disease, skin rashes, depression, nausea, insomnia, and lowering of endogenous (produced by the body) progesterone levels. Natural progesterone has no significant side effects.

Natural Progesterone Cream is extracted from the Wild Yam (*Dioscorea villosa*) plant. It is an extract replica of the progesterone produced by the body. It has none of the above side effects of man-made progesterone and is un-patentable (hence of little interest to pharmaceutical companies). Natural progesterone cannot be taken by mouth because it is poorly absorbed in the intestine and is also broken down by the liver after absorption. It is well absorbed through the skin and not altered by the liver before the rest of the body is exposed to it. Some creams claim to be progesterone creams but they only contain the yam’s natural sterols. These are not effective. Look for creams that contain USP (pharmaceutical grade) progesterone derived from the yam.

Uses and Benefits:

Much research is already available regarding NPC. Most significant of which is its use in post-menopausal women. Currently, Estrogen Replacement Therapy (ERT) is recommended after menopause to slow/prevent the loss of bone mass (osteoporosis) and also to decrease the risk of developing atherosclerosis and coronary artery disease (“heart attack”). [Note: Some authorities are not convinced that estrogen prevents heart disease.] However, non-human and synthetic ERT is associated with an increase risk of breast, ovary, and uterine cancer, and blood clots, weight gain, fluid retention, breast tenderness, high blood pressure, and high blood sugar. Taking Provera concomitantly offsets the increased incidence of uterine cancer only and is the cause of some of the above side effects. The most frequently prescribed estrogen is Premarin which is derived from pregnant horse (mare) urine. Synthetic progestin causes the following side effects: bloating, headache, seizures, asthma, cardiac or renal dysfunction, raised blood pressure, fatigue, weight gain, increased risk of birth defects (if taken in the first four months of pregnancy), acne, alopecia, hirsutism, decreased thyroid regulation, depression and may lead to sudden or partial loss of vision, thrombophlebitis, pulmonary embolism and cerebral thrombosis(stroke). It can actually increase the symptoms of PMS. According to John R. Lee, M.D. natural progesterone causes no side effects.

NPC has been shown to increase bone mass in postmenopausal women single handily (without estrogen). Dr. John Lee M.D. is the foremost researcher on the use of NPC and only uses ERT on post menopausal patients with vaginal dryness/atrophy and severe hot flashes (NPC relieves some hot flashes but not vaginal dryness/atrophy). He believes that ERT is not needed to increase bone mass and prevent osteoporosis. His landmark study in 1981 using NPC in postmenopausal women showed an increase of up to 10% in bone density within the first six months followed by a continued increase annually at the rate of 3% to 5% until stabilizing at the levels common to a healthy 35 year-old woman. (Lancet 90;336(8726):1327) (Inter. Clin. Nutr. Rev. 90;10(3):385-91). Of note is that the

simultaneous use of Premarin did not improve the rate of bone mass increase. Progesterone binds with “osteoblasts” which are the cells that make new bone. Estrogen, on the other hand, decreases bone resorption by the “osteoclasts” which are the cells that “eat up” bone so that it can be remodeled and strengthened.

Other benefits of NPC are protection against breast, cervical and uterine cancer, relief of fluid retention, an anti-depressant effect, increase in sex drive (progesterone and testosterone are responsible for libido), stabilization of blood sugar levels, increased energy, and decrease in facial hair in older women. NPC is particularly helpful in relieving the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Relative estrogen dominance occurs at the end of the menstrual cycle as progesterone levels drop resulting in PMS. NPC prevents this drop thereby preventing the results/symptoms of estrogen excess including: fluid retention, low blood sugar levels, blood clotting, fibroid and tumor development, breast tenderness, increased blood fat levels, copper retention and zinc loss and loss of libido. Lastly, NPC frequently is prescribed by nutritionally oriented physicians for depression, migraine headaches, endometriosis, and menopausal symptoms.

Cancer and Progesterone

Unopposed estrogens are the only known cause of endometrial cancer and one or more estrogens are known to contribute to breast cancer incidence. Breast cancer is more likely to occur in premenopausal woman (after age 35) with normal or high estrogen levels and low progesterone levels (estrogen dominance). Also cancer occurs after menopause when women are given estrogen supplementation without progesterone.

The cancer protective benefits of progesterone is clearly indicated in a 20 year plus study by John Hopkins Medical School and published in the American Journal of Epidemiology in 1981. The only factors evaluated in the study were estrogen and progesterone levels. The findings revealed that the incidence of breast cancer in the low progesterone group was over 80 percent greater than that in the group with normal progesterone. When the study looked at the low progesterone group for all types of cancer, they found that women in the low progesterone group experiences a tenfold increase from all malignant cancers, compared to the normal progesterone group. This would suggest (indicate) that having a normal level of progesterone protected women from nine-tenths of all cancers that might otherwise have occurred.

Which women should use NPC post menopause?

- Those who refuse taking prescription estrogen/progesterone replacements.
- Any woman with medical conditions which make ERT dangerous. These include: obesity, varicose veins, elevated cholesterol/triglycerides, fibrocystic breast disease, history of breast cancer, endometrial cancer, clotting disorders, thromboembolism, gallbladder disease or cholestatic jaundice.

Osteoporosis:

Dr. Lee’s program using NPC incorporated the following guidelines:

- A high calcium diet (low fat yogurt, cheese, beans, soybeans, salmon with bones, dark green vegetables, especially broccoli, kale, collards, sesame seeds, sardines, cabbage).
- Minimal red meat (3 times per week or less). No sodas due to their high phosphorus content which interferes with calcium absorption. No smoking or alcohol use.
- Nutritional supplements including: Calcium citrate 800-1000 mg/day, Vitamin D 1000 IU/day, Vitamin C 2000 mg/day, Beta-carotene.
- Exercise 20 minutes/day or 30 minutes 3 times/week.

- NPC was to be applied 2 weeks each month. All were to use ½ to ⅓ of a 1-ounce (32 gram) jar each month.

Estrogen Effects	Progesterone Effects
Increase endometrial cancer risk	Prevents endometrial cancer
Increases breast cancer risk	Protects against breast cancer
Slightly retards bone resorption	Increases bone replacement
Increases body fat and salt and fluid retention	Helps convert fat to energy
Promotes blood clotting	Normalizes blood clotting
Decreases sex drive	Restores sex drive
Stimulates breast cells	Protects against fibrocysts
Causes fluid retention	Natural diuretic
Reduces vascular tone	Restores vascular tone
Linked to depressive mood	Natural antidepressant
Impairs blood sugar control	Normalizes blood sugar levels
Improves lipid panel	Maintains improvement in lipids
Interferes with thyroid hormone	Facilitates thyroid hormone action

SYMPTOMS AND SIGNS OF PROGESTERONE DEFICIENCY

- Hot flashes
- Night sweats
- Vaginal dryness
- Foggy thinking
- Memory lapses
- Incontinence
- Depressed
- Anxiety
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia)
- Heart palpitations
- Water retention
- Premenstrual syndrome
- Early miscarriages
- Cyclical headaches
- Painful or lumpy breasts (mastodynia)
- Infertility