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## **Hormones, Moods & Emotion:**

### **An Interview with Dr. Phyllis Bronson**

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We had an opportunity to speak with Dr. Phyllis Bronson, a recognized expert on the influence that hormones have on moods and emotions. Dr. Bronson holds a doctorate in molecular chemistry, and she currently teaches and continues to conduct research at the University of Denver. Her doctoral thesis focused on the molecular structure of progesterone; specifically, the significant molecular difference in the fat-soluble structure of "real" progesterone and the water-soluble structure of medroxyprogesterone, and how this difference impacts a person psychologically.

Dr. Bronson's work as a clinical biochemist enables her to continue to explore the relationships between hormones and psychology, gathering data as she works alongside practitioners while assisting them with patients. In fact, Dr. Bronson is currently working on a book with the tentative title *Hormones, Mood and Emotion, Finding Balance As We Age*, which intends to bring the observations she has amassed through her years of research to the general public.

One of the things we learned during our interview is Dr. Bronson's dislike for the word "anti-aging" when it comes to describing hormone therapies. She explained that she sees the body more as a container that needs to have the appropriate quantity and proper mix of hormones and neuro-nutrients in order to create balance and optimal well-being. She added that the mistaken notions now held by mainstream medicine that women don't need progesterone as they age, and that women who have had a hysterectomy don't need progesterone, have left many women extremely vulnerable to anxiety, especially at a time of their lives when they may be experiencing considerable stress.

For example, Dr. Bronson told us of a woman who had a long history of seizures, and a mood that had always been overly anxious and irritable. The practitioner had prescribed a combination of estradiol and estriol daily, along with 200 mg of progesterone during only one week per month. But this was not working to produce the desired results, and Dr. Bronson suspected that it was not the right formula for this patient. From her research, Dr. Bronson knew that progesterone creates calmness, so she recommended 400 mg of progesterone to be used nightly, with an additional 100 mg dose during the day. Not only did this diminish the woman's seizures, but it gave her an overall sense of calm that had been missing her entire life! What a gift!

Dr. Bronson explained that many women in mid-life have become part of the "sandwich generation," having to care for elderly parents and still look after their children, which can cause incredible stress. As women age, the list of stress-producing factors seems to grow, including their adult children or adult siblings, divorce, step families, career changes and financial concerns. As the stress mounts, Dr. Bronson observed that a rapid drop in estradiol occurs.

At menopause, the production of estrogens shifts from ovarian-produced estradiol to estrone, which is produced in the fat cells from DHEA. When the available estradiol drops below about 50 pg, the first symptom many women experience is brain fog. The brain contains both alpha and beta receptors for estradiol, which makes it extremely sensitive to fluctuations or deficiencies. Adequate estradiol is also a limiting factor on the neural degeneration associated with Alzheimer's disease. One of Dr. Bronson's recommendations for maintaining healthy brain function as women age is to get the estradiol level back up to a healthy level, and maintain it.

In her book, Dr. Bronson will relate lots of stories about women and how they live, survive and thrive in their various relationships. Her philosophy is to integrate Jungian psychology while also paying attention to the biochemical changes that occur. She also observes that sometimes higher doses of progesterone, estradiol and testosterone may be needed so that "you can be happy being you" no matter what age you are. Dr. Bronson believes one of the keys to successful aging is being able to "hang out with uncertainty," especially during such a transitional period in one's life.

More about Dr. Bronson's work, including links to many of her published papers, can be found on her website at [www.phyllisbronsonphd.com](http://www.phyllisbronsonphd.com).