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# The HORMONE CURE

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## Dr. Sara's 10 Hormone Commandments

*I wrote these 10 Commandments with great respect for our religious traditions, but also with the belief that we are more enlightened from our cells to our souls when our hormones work for us, not against us. Enjoy (and please don't take them too seriously – I added a few top 40 lyrics to help you stay light-hearted)!*

### 1. You may have a hormone imbalance and not know it

#### **The Science:**

70% of why you feel like crap is hormonal, whether you're fat, frazzled, frumpy or unsexy. But most people go through life thinking their excess weight and bad mood is their fault...or their genetics. Taking control of your hormones and restoring balance fixes mood, sleep, sex drive, and vitality.

#### **The Solution:**

Take my free hormonal assessment quiz! See where you can start applying targeted strategies to get your hormones back on track. <http://thehormonecurebook.com/quiz/>

### 2. All paths lead to cortisol (the hormone with *impulse control issues*)

#### **The Science:**

As the alpha hormone, cortisol has a major impact on whether your other hormones are able to do their job. If you suffer from elevated cortisol, this can block the function of your other key hormones and leave you feeling tired, washed out, and uninterested in sex. If you have too much stress in your life, this creates elevated cortisol levels, which leads to high blood sugar, a slower metabolism, poor sleep and a decreased sex drive. Some unlucky individuals operate as though they're on high alert all the time – these are the people that desperately need to reset the way their body responds to stressful situations.

#### **The Solution:**

Better manage the way that your body responds to stress. I love the GPS for the Soul mobile phone app. Using the phone's camera, this

app measures heart rate variability and then guides the user through a variety of stress-relieving techniques

Avicii knows it's better not to go old-school when it comes to stress management:

*Come on people, we have all seen the signs*

*And we will never get back to*

*To the old school*

*To the old rounds, it's all about the newfound*

- Silhouettes

Yoga, chanting, mindfulness and deep breathing have also been shown to significantly reduce stress, cortisol, and raise melatonin and serotonin. A great way to lower cortisol via supplements is to eat wild Alaskan salmon, or omega 3s. And lastly, I recommend that you claim "tiara time" – tell your family that you need 15 minutes alone, put on your tiara, and have a quiet moment. By the way: the people who feel like they have the least time to spare when it comes to managing stress are the ones who need it the most!

### 3. Prevent hormone resistance, especially cortisol resistance

#### **The Science:**

Hormone resistance will be the topic of hormonal conversation, at least among geeks like me who find hard data... well, sexy. There's progesterone resistance in PMS, there's thyroid resistance, there's estrogen resistance in the brain of women aged 43+. More on this a bit later. We also know that after bathing in high cortisol for too long, you may be at risk for "glucocorticoid" resistance. I know, I know. Short version: About 40-45% of caucasians have the short serotonin gene, which makes them have a hot amygdala, feel hypervigilant, and perceive most interactions as a threat? Do you know anyone like that? A woman in perimenopause, perhaps?

Well, our task, my friends, is to prevent hormone resistance. Let's start with preventing cortisol resistance, which is my pet name (slightly oversimplified for the sake of fun) for glucocorticoid resistance.

Too much stress makes you fat, especially at your belly, where fat cells have four times the number of cortisol receptors compared to fat cells elsewhere. Wayward cortisol causes problems with blood sugar. Even small changes such as with drinking coffee, can raise blood sugar and increase insulin resistance. High cortisol is found of half of people with depression, and is a marker for suicide. Oh, cortisol...

*You'll have me suicidal, suicidal...*

- Sean Kingston, Suicidal

### **The Solution:**

Create your top 5 list of how you most love to hit the “PAUSE” button. You’ve got several suggestions in the Hormone Commandments, but add to it anything you’d like. My book has many suggestions from Alternate Nostril Breathing, to Chanting, to HeartMath, to orgasm (or Orgasmic Meditation). If you still need more ideas, read on - I’ve got a little Tonglen for you in a moment.

Your mind plays a major role in managing cortisol levels, so choose to perceive stressors with more detachment. Find the gap. It may not feel like you have the time, but spend 15 minutes doing deep breathing, meditation, yoga, or even going for a short walk. The brief respite will clear your mind and remind you that you can handle this. Does that make you roll your eyes? Ok, let’s rock a little Tonglen instead. Here goes - I learned this from my favorite granny and Buddhist nun, Pema Chodron.



**Beginners:** When I was in my twenties, life was simpler, but I still experienced my share of stress and grief. I learned from an older friend about Pema Chodron, a spiritual teacher who inspires me because she is simultaneously a mom of two, grandmother of three, and a Buddhist nun. As I became a physician, I came up against unbearable experiences in the hospitals and my own medical practice, and turned to meditation for solace. Tonglen is a powerful practice that helps me develop compassion for myself and others. It allows you to get curious in a healthy way about the suffering of others, and paradoxically, this heals you as well. I practice tonglen when I experience heartbreak big and small. I practiced it daily when my beloved grandfather died at 93 this year. I practice it when I have a fight with my husband (at least when I have the wherewithal to think of it!). I practice it when my adolescent daughter and I try to navigate our differing

points of view—in other words, we’re both seething over something minor as we drive to school.

There are several ways to practice tonglen. I usually only practice the simple way, what Pema calls “Tonglen, on the spot.”

- a. Whatever you’re doing, *notice your breathing* (as I’ve mentioned, I often do this driving a car—no need to sit on a meditation cushion). If you can, put one hand on your belly and feel it rise as you inhale, and contract as you exhale. This flips the toggle switch from stress to calm, and rests your mind.
- b. Slow down your inhale and exhale, and allow them to be smooth. When you’ve got that, *take in the pain*—your pain, your beloved’s pain, your sense of loss.
- c. Exhale relieve, peace, and spaciousness.
- d. If you feel ready, inhale and exhale a blessing for the person (or pet) you’ve lost.

**Advanced:** The more advanced practice of tonglen has four stages, as I learned it from Pema Chodron. You rest your mind as in the first step of tonglen on the spot, and find stillness. As Pema teaches, it opens you clarity. Second stage is to work with texture or the quality of your grief. You breathe in your experience of heartbreak. Perhaps it’s black, bilious, and thick. You exhale what you want to feel—perhaps a sense of light, the fragrance of your favorite flower (I use peonies), and hope. Third, you bring your attention to your own story. You breathe in the details and emotions attached, and exhale or send out the relief in a form that feels congruent. The final part is to enlarge the vision. Exhale the healing and blessing to others in this situation, or for others who similarly suffer and are stuck. You can also practice this with the intention of taking on the suffering of another, such as the families affected in Newton. When I heard of the horrible events in Newton, I dropped into tonglen because I want to help and I know they are hurting. Pema helped me understand that tonglen helps us let go of our fear of suffering and grief.

#### 4. Don’t fall down the hormonal “flight of stairs”

##### **The Science:**

I first heard of this idea from Eric Braverman as a lecture earlier this year, and it makes a ton of sense to me. Don’t wait for the wake up call at the bottom of the stairs, like I had in my thirties.

Many hormone levels, such as estrogen and testosterone, start to drift downward when you’re in your twenties especially if you’re on birth control pills. If cortisol spikes too high it can pull your other hormones offline, including estrogen, progesterone, thyroid, DHEA,

and testosterone. The most common hormonal imbalance I see in women in their 20s is chronic stress and wayward cortisol.

In your 30s, I see low progesterone, sometimes low growth hormone. Both are accelerated by dysregulated cortisol (high, low, or even both in the same day).



In your 40s, all bets are off - you have the challenge of all three hormonal Charlie's Angels getting off kilter: Cortisol, Thyroid, Estrogen (in men, I call it the Three Amigos: Cortisol, Thyroid, Testosterone).

After menopause, whether that happens at 50 or 55, the hormones calm down again but now you're dealing with low estrogen, low progesterone, low androgens (testosterone, DHEA), maybe thyropause (low thyroid).

### **The Solution**

Here's the cool part - your adrenals, where you make the cortisol that may be causing all this trouble with other hormones via crosstalk, you can push the reset button. You can galvanize the innate intelligence of the body by amplifying the positive emotions. I learned from a colleague recently an important truth when it comes to adrenal repair, and that is: Your adrenals respond to what our heart tells our brain. So when you focus, for instance, on breathing in and out from the heart and someone you love, or when you

feel gratitude, or forgiveness -- it not only lowers cortisol, it creates heart coherence, adaptive suppleness, and repairs the adrenals.



*Here are my favorite two ways to do this:*

- At the end of your day, take your journal and write for 5 minutes “What Went Well.” This was studied at the University of Pennsylvania and researchers found that 5 minutes per day for one week improved happiness, and that happiness lasted 6 months! In other words, this prescription is only 5 minutes for 7 days, and it promotes your positive emotions for a full 6 months! How cool is that?!
- The InnerBalance (<http://www.heartmath.com/innerbalance/>) trainer is a wonderful tool that will get you in the mode of managing stress and cortisol early on. I couldn't recommend it more strongly. Other ways to manage stress include reducing caffeine intake, getting regular massages, or enjoying some high-quality dark chocolate now and then. Not too bad, right?

Additionally, starting around 30 to 35, monitor your progesterone. You want your progesterone : estradiol ratio on the 21st day of your cycle to be 300. If it's low, try taking 750 mg of Vitamin C daily. Other ways to increase progesterone include girl time, and reducing your caffeine and alcohol intake. Lastly, I recommend trying 500-1000 mg a day of Chasteberry, one of the most proven botanical therapies when it comes to raising progesterone. In fact, it helps PMS with similar effectiveness as Vitamin P (Prozac).

## **5. Apply The Gottfried Protocol – Start with how you eat/move/think**

### **The Science:**

The Gottfried Protocol is my step-by-step, integrative approach to hormone balance. It's a process that I developed over many years and with thousands of patients.

**Step 1** starts with lifestyle changes; tweaks that have been shown to balance hormones, whether that means starting a meditation practice to reduce stress and manage cortisol, or eating more whole foods to keep estrogen levels in check. You can do these on your own after getting the results of your self-assessment. Then we add targeted, natural supplements that fill in any nutritional gaps. This is often the “Aha!” moment for most of my patients; the time when they start to feel like their old self...or a happier, healthier version of their old self.

*But in all of my salvation I still felt imprisoned inside*

*That holding cell that is myself*

*So I wait for the day when I'll hear the key...*

- Bright Eyes, From a Balance Beam

**Step 2**, if symptoms are not resolved with Step 1, is to apply proven botanical therapies. I recommend that Steps 2 and 3 are performed in partnership with a trusted clinician so that you can trust your diagnosis. You'll get a better chance of a cure.

**Step 3**, the final step, is to add bioidentical hormones but at the lowest doses and for the shortest duration.

Remember, if the first two steps have been followed, the need for bioidentical hormones is usually greatly reduced.

### **The Solution:**

Because The Gottfried Protocol starts with lifestyle tweaks – think diet and exercise – then moves to natural, proven botanicals, and lastly, bioidentical hormones, it gets to the root cause of the problem rather than just slapping a Band-Aid on it. Not only does The Gottfried Protocol reduce the need for prescriptions, it only recommends strategies that have been proven in randomized trials. Long story short: science shows they work.

Take your muffin top, for instance. About 60% of my clients complain they have one.

Get your growth hormone – the most important hormone associated with aging – back up using Sprint 8. Sprint 8 is a system of super efficient interval training, with 8 rounds of high-intensity, burst training interspersed with recovery at your usual moderate level of exercise. This is how I defeated my own lagging growth hormone levels and raised them by 53%. Here's my Sacred Biohacker Sprint 8 Protocol. I began in February to perform Sprint 8 four times per week, and nothing else.

- Jog at moderate pace for 3 to 5 minutes. I have a genetic tendency toward an achilles injury, so I warm up for 5 minutes and stretch my achilles briefly. For me, the pace is a 12 minute mile or 5mph on a treadmill.

- Sprint all out for 30 seconds, so hard you can't go more than 30 seconds.
- Recover for 75 to 90 seconds. If you have trouble with math and/or have more time to spare, I encourage 90 seconds.
- Lather, rinse, repeat. Repeat the sprint for a total of 8 cycles.
- Cool down at your moderate pace. Done, Baby.

## 6. Attunement trumps labs

### **The Science:**

Your cells can, over time, grow numb to hormones. In this case, think of your hormones as the “little boy who cried wolf.” If you've been under so much stress that your cortisol levels stay elevated 24/7, eventually your cells will go deaf to all that frantic messaging. Hormone resistance is the result of sustained, elevated levels of hormones...and it can throw off results in clinical hormone tests and labs.

### **The Solution:**

Trust the self-assessment quiz and your own experience over labs. Hormone resistance can show low levels of cortisol (and other important hormones) when in fact, you've been elevated for so long that your cells have developed cortisol resistance. Your knowledge of how you've felt over the past weeks, months and years is more important than a level recorded from a single day in a lab. If your symptoms and labs are congruent, congratulations! You probably don't have hormone resistance!

## 7. Conserve natal chi

### **The Science:**

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, natal chi is the life force that we receive at conception, but in a fixed quantity. Natal chi cannot be supplemented so we must use it more slowly. Conserve it. We need to manage stress skillfully, keep cortisol from getting too high and/or too low, and keep our telomeres long.

### **The Solution:**

The genius Lisa Byrne at [WellGroundedLife.com](http://WellGroundedLife.com) taught me that certain scents encourage calmness, such as cedar wood, frankincense and sandalwood. These scents travel from your nose straight into your brain, and tap into your hypothalamus to trigger a calm response. Another way to lower cortisol and increase feelings of calm is – I'll say it again – to reduce your caffeine intake. Lastly, practice self-care: reduce resentment, forgive, and make sure you're keeping yourself healthy and happy enough to be a positive force in the lives of the people around you.



## 8. It's a process, not a prescription

### **The Science:**

The Gottfried Protocol is strongly geared towards avoiding prescriptions, as I don't believe the cure to health is found in a prescription pill bottle. Lisa Byrne gave me this quote too – "It's a Process, not a prescription."

At Harvard Medical School I was taught to prescribe birth control pills, hormone therapy, sleeping pills, and anti-depressants like it was my job. Okay, it was my job...but I could tell that those little slips of paper weren't the answers my patients were looking for.

*Hey, Honey, you could be my drug  
You could be my new prescription...*

- Neon Trees, Everybody Talks

Instead, I have found through years of research, practice, and more scientific-journal-reading than I ever thought possible, that taking a holistic view of health is the answer. The Gottfried Protocol and The Hormone Cure are designed to help people evaluate their lives and take a specialized approach to correcting their own hormone imbalances. I'm not recommending the exact same thing to everyone with high cortisol or low estrogen; I'm recommending they figure out what works for them.

### **The Solution:**

Take the hormone assessment quiz and dedicate yourself to achieving balanced hormones. This is your health: own it! Learn about the strategies that make sense for you, whether it's a new exercise routine, a supplement, or an iPhone app. As your body changes, so will the solutions, so staying flexible is just as important as staying balanced.

## 9. Safeguard organ reserve

### **The Science:**

Your organ reserve is an individual organ's ability to withstand demands (grueling work schedules, trauma, and surgery) and restore homeostasis. As you age, reserve declines: healthy young people have a reserve capacity that is 10 times greater than demand, but by age 85, organ reserve is a fraction of the original capacity. Bottom line: organ reserve is a crucial aspect of longevity—the more you protect and enhance your

functional capacity, the more able you are to bounce back from stresses such as illness, environmental toxins, and injury.

**The Solution:**

Organs get stressed when hormones are out of balance and they have to deal with too high or too low levels of important chemicals in your body. Keeping your hormones in balance keeps everything running smoothly internally without taxing your organs.

**10. It's easier to fix your hormones than to live with misery of imbalance**

**The Science:**

By now, you probably realize that hormone imbalance is a serious epidemic in our society. And hopefully, you've also realized that taking steps to balance your hormones is simple, and straightforward when you follow The Gottfried Protocol.

**The Solution:**

Start small, think modular. In fact, I encourage baby steps! After you take the hormone assessment quiz and see where your imbalance lies, try one strategy for a few days, a couple of weeks, or a month. If that works, great. If you're not quite where you want to be, take the next step. Add meditation, a supplement, an earlier bedtime. All of the strategies I recommend in *The Hormone Cure* are easy to implement...and so much easier than living a life of stress, excess weight, mood swings and a lackluster libido.

*I'm starting over taking,*

*One, two, baby steps.*

*Three, four, baby steps.*

*Five, six, baby steps.*

*I'm starting over again.*

- The Varsity, Baby Steps

*Dr. Sara Gottfried MD is an integrative physician and Author of **The Hormone Cure: Reclaim Balance, Sleep, Sex Drive, and Vitality Naturally with The Gottfried Protocol**. To learn more about how to accelerate your natural hormone balance, go to <http://www.saragottfriedmd.com/fasttrackmycure/>*

