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# Focus on Health

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John R. Woodward, M.D.,P.A.  
Gynecologic Endocrinology,  
Gynecologic Urology

February 2003

## Hot Flashes

**W**hat is a 'hot flash'? What causes it? 80% of women experience them at one time or another. A hot flash is a sudden, intense version of what the body normally does to cool down when it is overheated. They are linked to declining (and fluctuating) estrogen levels and estrogen replacement therapy quickly stops them. But their origin, which must originate in the hypothalamus of the brain, remains a mystery. Too much epinephrine (adrenalin) in the brain seems to play a major role. Other interesting facts: Hot flashes occur less often in Asian women, warm environments (like Dallas) can definitely bring on hot flashes, and half of hot flashes don't cause "wake ups", and half of wake ups don't have flashes.

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A study at Harvard indicates that the C-reactive protein level in blood is a stronger predictor of cardiovascular events than the LDL cholesterol level.

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John R. Woodward, M.D.,P.A.  
7777 Forest Lane, Suite A338  
Dallas, Texas 75230  
(972) 566-7870

## Bio Identical Hormones

**A** good deal of confusion exists concerning use of the term "natural", particularly as it applies to hormones, as in "I want to be on natural hormones". There are fifteen different definitions for the word "natural" in the dictionary, and none of them applies correctly in describing hormones. The correct term, rather is "bio-identical", meaning the hormone replacement I advocate involves the use of estradiol and progesterone which are, molecule for molecule, absolutely identical to hormones produced by the human ovary, but are derived from a plant source. A steroid named diosgenin, extracted from either wild Mexican yams or, more recently, soy, is converted to these hormones by a chemical process. The human body is not capable of transforming diosgenin to either estradiol or progesterone, so using wild yam cream or eating soy is of no benefit in terms of hormone replacement therapy.

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## Immune System Indicator

**E**ndometriosis is a condition in which the inner lining of the uterus, called endometrium, grows elsewhere in the body, causing pain, infertility, etc. It effects 8-10 percent of women of childbearing age. These women apparently have an immune system abnormality possibly involving chemicals called cytokines, and are much more likely to develop other abnormalities involving the immune system later in life. These include chronic fatigue syndrome (more than 100 times more likely), hypothyroidism, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and other allergies.

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## Geographical Breast Cancer Puzzle

**W**omen who live in Marin County, California, Long Island, New York and Cape Cod, Massachusetts, face an unusually high risk of developing breast cancer (around 70% higher). Scientists are so far at a loss to explain the phenomenon, although they are actively studying it from several angles. Results are due this year.