



Pink Ink



Providing education and motivation for women's hormonal health. Pass it on!

What the Heck's a Hormone?

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& Pejman Cohan, M.D.



Turning My Pain Into My Passion

Sharmyn McGraw: "The Who's Who of Hormones"

The biggest blessing in my entire life was just cleverly disguised as a horrible illness.

The pituitary gland is a small, bean-shaped gland located below the brain in the base of the skull.

Weighing less than one gram, the pituitary gland is often called the "master gland" since it controls the secretion of hormones. These substances have a dramatic and broad range of effects on metabolism, growth and maturation, sexuality and reproduction and other important bodily functions.

Structurally, the pituitary gland is divided into a larger anterior region and a smaller posterior region. The gland is connected to a region of the brain called the hypothalamus by the pituitary stalk.

Directly above the pituitary gland and in front of the pituitary stalk are the crossing fibers of the optic nerves called the optic chiasm.

On each side of the pituitary gland is the cavernous sinus. Through each cavernous sinus runs a carotid artery that carries blood to the brain, and important nerves that control eye movements.

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Growing up wasn't easy. By the time my parents were 24 years old they had four children all under the age of six and with very little money. My dad left home when he was 16 and had been abused most of his life. Dad was a real cowboy and looked like the Marlboro Man. My mom was Miss Las Vegas 1956 and my oldest sister was born in March 1957, my next sister was born in 1958, my brother in 1960 and last but not least I was born in 1962. My mother's parents, Granny and Grampie, grew up in a small town in Illinois. Neither one had more than a high-school education and struggled like most to make ends meet during the depression. By 1964 our situation wasn't good at home -- mom and dad were getting divorced, and my Grandparents thought it best that they raise my brother and me, so off we went in the back seat of their white Buick, to live miles and miles apart from our mom, dad and two older sisters.

My brother had a hard time; he missed our family and cried a lot. He didn't know how to get positive attention so he was always in trouble and my job was to try and keep him from getting swatted with Grampie's belt. That was not an easy job for such a little girl! My brother and I were glued at the hip so I took on the role as his caregiver. We had nice things at our new house, and even though we all pretended, no one was happy. And no matter how hard I tried my brother got Grampie's belt a lot, so by the age of three I had made it my job to take care of everyone. But as Grampie's drinking got worse and Granny's bitching got louder, I knew I had no other choice but to shut down emotionally -- it was too painful, and I had a job to do. I could not allow my own sad feelings to get in the way of making sure everyone else's needs were met. After about a year, our two older sisters moved in with us and now we were one big messed-up family again.

Our parents would stop in to visit every once in awhile, and both mom and dad remarried. One summer day when I was seven, my dad paid us an unexpected visit to ask my grandparents permission to take my brother and two older sisters to his house in Las Vegas, Nevada for a week. It was a strange request especially since he didn't ask to take me. My grandparents said no, but my dad's a real charmer and before I knew it, off they went without me. I was devastated I hadn't been included, but I knew better than to show my feelings so I was a good girl for Granny and Grampie. On Friday we packed the Buick to drive Saturday from California to Las Vegas to my dad's and pick up my brothers and sisters, and I couldn't wait.

Awakened at midnight, I could hear my grandparents both very upset as they talked to my dad on the telephone. I was scared, standing in my pajamas by my Grampie's side as he begged my dad not to do it. With tears running down my Granny's checks she told me to get in the car right away, and off we went in the pitch dark. Driving like a madman and sobbing, my Grampie tried to explain that my dad had kidnapped my brother and sisters, and we didn't know how to find them.

Read more articles, meet my top docs, watch videos of educational presentations, and find support and encouragement at www.hormones411.org!

(What the Heck's a Hormone?, cont.)

Because of the close proximity of the pituitary gland to these major intracranial nerves and blood vessels, as well as the vital hormonal control the pituitary gland provides, disorders of the pituitary can cause a wide spectrum of symptoms, both hormonal and neurological.

Listed below are the specific hormones produced by the pituitary:

Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH) As the name implies, TSH stimulates the thyroid gland to release thyroid hormones.

Growth Hormone (GH)
This is the principal hormone that, among many other functions, regulates growth and metabolism.

Adrenocorticotropic Hormone (ACTH) ACTH triggers the adrenals to release the hormone cortisol. This hormone, in turn, regulates carbohydrate, fat, and protein metabolism.

Luteinizing Hormone (LH) and **Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH)**- These hormones control the production of sex hormones (estrogen and testosterone) as well as sperm and egg maturation and release.

Prolactin (PRL) This hormone stimulates secretion of breast milk.

Vasopressin Also called anti-diuretic hormone (ADH)- This hormone serves to allow the water to be reabsorbed by the kidneys.

In a diseased state, the pituitary gland produces either too much or too little hormone. Pituitary tumors may lead to overproduction of one or more of these hormones.

In most cases, if an early diagnosis is made and proper treatment is started, the patients' quality of life is much improved.

Hormones: The Best Kept Secret in Medicine

Sharmyn McGraw gained 100 pounds in just one year despite a healthy lifestyle. Her condition, which went undiagnosed for seven years, was caused by a hormonal pituitary brain tumor. She now speaks professionally, educating health professionals and raising public awareness about these misunderstood disorders.

Once we arrived in Las Vegas, my grandparents hired an attorney, and after months of numerous dead ends we got a break -- we found out dad had been hiding at the Las Vegas sheriff's house with the kids. A Las Vegas judge forced my dad out of hiding, and he had to return my brother and sisters to Granny and Grampie, but things were never the same. Unthinkable things went on while the kids were with my dad, and the damage emotionally drove our already dysfunctional family farther apart.

School was rough -- I had too many distractions at home to deal with, so at best I got Cs and Ds. High school was worse, and when I went to college I tested in English at a fourth grade level. I was really good at art (I took after my dad -- he's an amazing artist), so I studied graphic design. Finally, I was diagnosed with severe dyslexia; my IQ is high, but my brain functions in a way that makes traditional learning methods ineffective. So I learned to avoid reading, writing, or math.

By high school my oldest sister was pregnant and doing drugs and alcohol, and I was the poster-child for codependency. My family's drama was non-stop. But one day, I was diagnosed with a large tumor in my chest pressing on my heart and lungs. I had a rare tumor called Castelman's disease, and I needed thoracic surgery immediately. Recovery was long and painful, but I could never show any emotions because I still had a job to do -- taking care of everyone but myself. I was a pretty girl with long thick blond hair and a nice figure, and I was very popular. I hung out with a group of "Trust Fund Babies" in Newport Beach (a very wealthy area in southern California), where no one is too rich or too thin, and anorexia is a complement not a disease. I was an expert at living everyone else's life but mine, so I was really fun to be around, but horrible at picking boyfriends.

Then one day, all the years of my own codependent chaos was forced to stop, because again I became chronically ill with a debilitating disease -- only this time no one was willing to help me. That's when I started my personal journey to start living my own life, and over the next seven years, with a lot of soul searching and kicking and screaming, I discovered an amazing, persistent, articulate, intelligent, loving and extremely passionate person hidden deep inside of myself. I had been waiting for the opportunity to share my gifts and talents with others, but for all those years, I stayed in the background of life, because I was truly convinced I was unlovable.

For seven years I search for answers to the illness that was killing me; I gained 100 lbs in a year, my stomach looked like I was having twins, I lost most of my hair, most of my friends, and I almost lost my life. But as sick as I was, I stayed persistent, and each day I became more of my real self. Finally I found the correct diagnosis via the Internet -- I had Cushing's disease, a secondary disease caused by a pituitary brain tumor. (*Read more about pituitary tumors on www.hormones411.org*)

After Dr. Daniel Kelly, my neurosurgeon & angel, literally gave me my life back, my passion grew strong and I knew I had to make a difference for others, but as a leader this time, not someone addicted to other people's problems. Pituitary tumors are so often misdiagnosed and misunderstood, and I knew I couldn't stop until I could help make a powerful and positive impact for others as well as myself. And although I was afraid to write even a simple note to someone, I knew my passion to help others was stronger than my fear of writing. And I'm so grateful because; I'm now a published author, I facilitate the largest pituitary patient support group in the US, I've done radio, television, I'm a professional speaker and better yet, I turned my very painful life into my life filled with excellent health, charisma, adventure, love, peace, fun and a LOT of passion. But yet I always remember to never put other people's needs, feeling or desires before my own. I can't do for others what I won't do for myself.

Finding a correct diagnosis saved my life, finding my passion is helping to save other people's lives, believing in myself and knowing I am extremely lovable-Priceless! For more information about my "Turning Pain into Passion" workshops please visit my website at www.hormones411.org.

This is Dedicated in Loving Memory of My Oldest Sister.
Thank You For Always Loving Me.

Peace and Blessings,
Sharmyn

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