



## **Ageless:**

### The naked truth about bioidentical hormones

By Suzanne Somers  
Crown Publishers

#### **General Notes:**

Although in 2005 Suzanne Somers came out with another book called *Slim & Sexy Forever*, *Ageless* is her follow up book to *The Sexy Years*, her initial book about bioidentical hormones. As with *The Sexy Years*, this book presents a series of interviews with doctors and other health practitioners about the subjects of aging, hormone supplementation, lifestyle and various therapies. In addition to the interviews, Suzanne Somers adds comments about her personal experiences. This book is larger than *The Sexy Years* with more interviews and a broader reach. I am afraid that in many ways it is a step over the edge — sometimes she moves forward, while in other ways she has gone over a cliff.

Somers first hormone guru was Diana Schwarzbein, MD an endocrinologist and primarily an expert on diabetes management. Dr. Schwarzbein used to work with an anthropologist named T.S. Wiley. They had a falling out and Suzanne Somers followed Wiley. Although I disagree with some points of Dr. Schwarzbein's management, (*which I suspect for Somers may have resulted in an unnecessary hysterectomy*), I feel that T. S. Wiley is totally misguided. As a result, readers of *Ageless* are liable to end up with more misinformation than readers of *The Sexy Years*. This is too bad. I feel that Suzanne Somers truly desires to do the right thing for her readers.

In November 2006, Suzanne Somers was on the Larry King show with Schwarzbein, Wiley, Erica Schwarz, M.D., and Utian Wolf, M.D. Chairman and past President of the North American Menopause Society. Wiley and Schwarzbein clearly despise each other now and their interactions have been bitter and nasty. Dr. Wolf was deprecating bioidentical hormones — repeating the same arguments I listened to each day at the annual meeting of NAMS in October 2006. While watching the episode, I felt that Suzanne Somers was the only honest person on the show. Anything she writes will sell and make her money—she doesn't have to lie or make things up. I believe that she is trying to gather the best information she can. Unfortunately, by following T. S. Wiley, I believe that she has gone astray.

Because the book is a series of interviews, I will review a number of chapters separately, as the accuracy of the information varies widely depending on who is being interviewed.

### **Introduction**

The three introductory chapters make many good points, but I disagree in several areas. In *The Sexy Years*, Schwarzbein states that progesterone leads to gestational diabetes (diabetes of pregnancy). She is wrong. The placenta makes a hormone called Human Placental Lactogen (HPL). It is the HPL that increases insulin resistance and can lead to gestational diabetes. Because of this error, Schwarzbein only uses progesterone for ten days of the month and in small doses. She also tends to use larger doses of estrogen. I believe this can lead to estrogen excess. Schwarzbein states that she wants all of her menopausal patients to have full periods. I disagree. I believe in using less estrogen and more progesterone (and for a greater amount of days). Most of my patients have little or no withdrawal bleeding on the days that they stop their progesterone. Suzanne Somers states that she developed *severe hyperplasia* and was experiencing irregular bleeding (page 20). She ultimately had a hysterectomy. It is my belief that with less estrogen along with taking progesterone for longer periods of time, the hyperplasia would have been reversed or not have occurred at all.

T. S. Wiley is even further off track. For one thing, she states that Americans are the sickest people on the planet. This is wildly untrue. Large areas of Africa and South Asia are rampant with malaria, AIDS and many other parasitic and infectious diseases that usually kill most women before they reach anywhere near the menopausal years. The notion that “the importance of ovulation in the human female body is to let the brain know a woman is well, healthy and reproductive,” is a fantasy (page 22). For most of human history, women were either pregnant or breastfeeding the bulk of their life. After a few periods they would become pregnant again. Pregnancy is heavily progesterone dominated and breastfeeding is a low hormone state. On page 24, Somers states, “Those original birth control pills we took are the same synthetic hormones that the Woman’s Health Initiative 2002 warned us to stop taking.” This is also wrong. The synthetic estrogens and progestin in Prempro from the WHI differ markedly from any birth control pill. There is no reason to believe that the side effects of the Provera in Prempro are true for birth control progestin — in many cases the effects are known to be different.

Most of the arguments Somers makes in this section of the book come from T.S. Wiley. Virtually all of the basic statements of fact are incorrect, leading to erroneous conclusions. It is really too bad. Careful, measured use of bioidentical hormones have many benefits. Uzzi Reese, who was interviewed in *The Sexy Years* is so much more knowledgeable than Wiley—Somers is following the wrong guru.

In the next hundred pages, there is a lot of good information, but again, some are crazy T. S. Wiley ideas. She presents a concept that the brain thinks a woman is useless if they are not reproductive and *will ultimately try to kill off women*. Her solution is to fool the brain with hormones so the brain will think a woman is still young. This is strange stuff and has very little to do with physiology.

Wiley promotes a “rhythmic HRT to trick the brain into believing that women are still functioning, reproductive beings.” She does not provide any convincing reasons that these are scientifically valid ideas. I believe that she has come up with a very complicated solution to a nonexistent problem.

### **Chapter 7, Dr. Taguchi — breast cancer**

Although Dr. Taguchi makes some good points, she believes that low estrogen levels raise the risk of breast cancer. In fact, the opposite is true — it is due to estrogen excess. Taguchi does not seem to appreciate the importance of natural progesterone.

### **Chapter 8, Dr. Darrow — bone health**

Dr. Darrow’s points about the dangers of soft drinks are very important. I don’t know if taking anti-inflammatory drugs will really “drive the pain further into tissue,” but it might dull the pain and allow further repeated injury.

### **Chapter 9, Dr. Hall — hormones**

Many of Wiley’s inaccuracies are repeated here. Maintaining normal stomach acid levels is important but Dr. Hall’s female hormone theories are mostly wrong.

### **Chapter 11, T. S. Wiley**

I already said it.

### **Chapters 12 through 15 — men**

There is a lot of good information. I could comment on a few small points, but mostly Dr. Shippen is very knowledgeable. His book, *The Testosterone Syndrome* is also good.

### **Part Three — sex, sleep and stress**

Lots of informative detail, but I disagree about mammograms (page 251). It may be true that 15% of tumors are missed but that means that 85% are seen. No screening test is perfect but mammograms are the best we currently have. Much of what it is said about stress is true, except for one thing. People in many parts of the world (along with earlier centuries) significantly live a more stressful life versus today’s America. Most people died young — old age is only a problem if someone lives to see it.

### **Part Four — detoxification**

There is some good material, but also a little hocus-pocus. In the past, people lived in very toxic environments. Imagine heating and cooking over an open fire in the middle of your house — the incessant smoke was terrible. Fireplaces and chimneys were not invented until the 1600s. Arsenic was sprayed in the U.S. to keep bugs away from apples. Raw sewage ran in the streets in most cities. Some environments are worse now, but most are better. Dr. Robert Greene wrote a book called *Perfect Hormone Balance*. For some reason, he has an aversion to progesterone and relishes birth control pills. To solve hormone imbalance in young women, his answer is to remove the ovaries.

### **Part Five — supplements**

My review is mixed. Some good points are made, but as we age our bodies need extra amounts of many nutrients. If we tried to take the additional amount of nutrients in whole foods only, total calorie intake would be way too much. In prior times, it was impossible for people to get enough nutrients and most were sick

a majority of the time. By the way, most animals in the wild are ill a majority of the time — this is why supplements are very important.

### **Two additional points**

Human Growth Hormone injections are very expensive. There is much money to be made and because insurance companies will not pay for older adults to receive the shots, therapy has to be paid in cash. Growth hormone is hard to calculate and most measures are indirect with little known data. I don't know what the final answer will be, but for now growth hormone is relegated for the wealthy.

Somers receives supplemental intravenous infusions. This is also very expensive and time consuming — she can afford both the money and time. The program she adheres to would normally cost tens of thousands of dollars annually (if in fact, she actually pays for these therapies). Her book is a great infomercial and I am sure helps the business of any of the doctors she includes. I doubt that the doctors are directly paying her, but she may be getting some of her medical care at a reduced cost. It would be difficult for most people to afford the program Somers practices.

### **Final**

I think Suzanne Somers is a terrific person. I believe that she genuinely wishes to promote only the best information in her books. I feel that most of the doctors she interviews are sincere and try to do the best for their patients. This field is still in its early stages. I change my medical and hormone practice all the time as I try new things and learn more from reading, speaking to other doctors, taking courses, and learning from my patients. When reading any material, keep in mind that it may not be correct. In this life, we are all learning and must choose our path based on the information we have at hand.

Robert P. Goldman, M.D.