

SUMMIT

Naturopathic News

STRESS AND ADRENAL FATIGUE

Somewhere down in Denver there's a 32 year old, single business woman who works 60-70 hours per week, in addition to her hour-long commute in traffic and smog. She stays up late finishing projects, drags herself out of bed in the morning and manages to get moving with the aid of a triple shot of espresso. She has no time for breakfast and grabs a Big Mac for lunch between clients. She's ravenous by the time she gets home from work, and inhales a bag of chips or a box of Girl Scout cookies.

She is stressed out.

This may not sound like a typical scenario in Summit County, but our stress comes in other forms. We are stressed from 8 months of cold winter, from the financial challenge of living here and, sometimes, from exercising too much. We may be stressed from relationships, from illness, from the loss of loved ones, from raising children. Stress also comes from less obvious sources, such as poor nutrition, exposure to toxins and allergens. It is impossible to live in this world and remain completely stress-free, making the expression "don't worry yourself sick" more appropriate now than ever.

The good news is that our bodies have mechanisms for dealing with stress. One such mechanism is called the adrenal glands. Though not as well known as the metabolic gland called the thyroid, or the reproductive hormone secreting ovaries and testes, the adrenal glands are just as important. In fact, they may be more important to our survival. One study showed that mice, whose adrenal glands had been removed, died when exposed to any level of stress.

The adrenal glands, which are located on top of the kidneys, secrete a cast of hormones, including cortisol. Cortisol's function is to help us adapt to stress and to help protect our bodies from the ill-effects of stress. An extreme insufficiency of cortisol production is called Addison's disease, while extremely elevated production is called Cushing's disease. Somewhere in between these extremes and normal are areas of grey. These are called "adrenal stress" and "adrenal fatigue", and are very real phenomena.

Many people in our society suffer from either adrenal stress or adrenal fatigue. Some common symptoms include: fatigue, insomnia, water retention and/or weight gain, blood sugar imbalance, low immune function, inflammation, high or low blood pressure, decreased libido, allergies and sinusitis, increased symptoms of PMS and menopause, and cravings for salt, sugar or caffeine.

Most of the time, people who suffer from adrenal imbalance are told that nothing is wrong when standard laboratory testing shows no abnormalities. Although rarely performed, **it is possible to test adrenal function and cortisol levels using "functional adrenal testing."** **This can be done through your naturopath using samples of blood, urine or, preferably, saliva.**

It is impossible to eliminate all stress from our lives, and arguably, some amount of stress keeps us healthy. However, the most important aspect of recovering from adrenal stress or fatigue is to minimize stress as much as possible, and to properly manage stress that we cannot change. Stress

management comes in many different forms for many different people, but includes varied activity such as yoga, massage, meditation, prayer, support groups and counseling, outdoor activity and exercise, reading, knitting, and, just breathing. In other words, it is important to nurture yourself. Your life may depend on it.

Proper nutrition is also important, as with any health-related condition. Eat a balanced diet, rich in whole, clean foods, such as organic fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans and legumes. Avoid processed foods and stimulants, such as sugar, soda and coffee. Include a good, quality multivitamin and mineral, rich in B-vitamins in your daily routine.

There are a variety of botanicals that can help to support the adrenal glands. Some of the more commonly used include licorice, Siberian ginseng, cordyceps, rhodiola and ashwaganda. The most appropriate herbal blend is dictated by the type of adrenal imbalance. Additional and stronger treatments or prescriptions are available and may be necessary, depending on the severity of the imbalance.

12 simple things you can do to help relieve stress:

1. **Breath.** Rarely do we use our full lung capacity. By breathing deeply, we can slow down The heart rate and help cleanse stress from the body.
2. **Exercise.** But don't overdo it! Excessive exercise is stressful to the body. Yoga and Qigong are restorative forms.
3. **Pray or Meditate.** Countless studies show the power of prayer.
4. **Turn off your television.** The news can be very stressful and television commercials are speedy and loud.
5. **Sit quietly in nature.** We are blessed with an abundance of that here.
6. **Join or start a book, writing, or other social group.** Social connections can be very healing.
7. **Take naps.**
8. **Plant a garden.**
9. **Laugh.**
10. **Give back to your community.** Help recycle, clean up and plan your town. Healing the Earth can help heal ourselves.
11. **Take baths.** Add epsom salts and lavender to aid in the relaxation.
12. **Eat a variety of clean, whole foods** and then indulge every once in a while. Dr. John Bastyr, a father of modern Naturopathic medicine, said we all must have our vices.