

Stress is an unavoidable fact of life. Fortunately we have physiologic systems in place to help us cope in our response to stress. When our bodies are under stress, our adrenal glands produce hormones in order for us to respond to the stress. The adrenals or stress glands produce the hormones cortisol and DHEA which create the short and long term hormone responses. The adrenals also produce adrenalin which stimulates the instant stress hormone response otherwise known as "fight or flight". Chronic exposure to stress can result in what is known as the General Adaptation Syndrome, which has three major stages.

### **Alarm Stage**

In the Alarm stage, bursts of the hormones cortisol and adrenaline are released in response to a stressor, resulting in the traditional "fight, flight or freeze" responses.

### **Resistance Stage**

In the resistance stage, the body uses high cortisol levels to free up stored energy that helps the body physically resist the stressor. It is now known that a prolonged resistance stage may increase the risk of developing stress related diseases. If cortisol levels remain elevated, symptoms may include feeling tired but wired, having difficulty sleeping, weight gain around the waist, high blood pressure, hair loss, muscle mass loss and anxiety. Excess cortisol also interferes with the action of other hormones like progesterone, testosterone and thyroid which further creates more imbalances and increasing symptoms.

### **Exhaustion Stage**

At this stage, the adrenals are either depleted from producing too much cortisol or are reacting to the detrimental effects of high cortisol. This reduces the cortisol production significantly. Symptoms of low cortisol include fatigue (especially morning fatigue), increased susceptibility to infections, decreased recovery from exercise, allergies, low blood sugar, a burned out feeling, depression and low sex drive.

### **How can you tell if you have Adrenal Fatigue?**

You may be suffering from Adrenal Fatigue if you regularly experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Depression and/or anxiety
- Increased abdominal fat
- Tired for no reason
- Trouble getting up in the morning even when you go to bed at a reasonable hour
- Feeling rundown or overwhelmed
- Lowered immune system
- Increased startle response
- Food cravings
- Blood sugar imbalances

Adrenal function can be measured through a saliva test called the Adrenal Stress Index or ASI and can be done by a natural medicine practitioner. The ASI measures the levels of the adrenal hormones throughout the day in order to get a true account of the fluctuations that should occur. Levels of DHEA and cortisol vary according to the level of stress and for how long that stress has been occurring. Increasing cortisol production is the normal response to stress and is highly desirable as long as the stress is removed and the adrenal glands can recover. Ongoing, unremitting stress means the adrenal glands and the whole body is in a constant state of alert, does not get time to recover, and eventually becomes exhausted. Identifying which stage you are in is extremely important in order to have the right treatment plan implemented.

With proper treatment most people can fully recover from Adrenal Fatigue. Improving your weakened or exhausted adrenals should include several measures including:

1. Reduce consumption of refined carbohydrates like white bread and high sugar foods. Refined carbohydrates cause insulin to be released. The release of insulin triggers the release of more cortisol, which causes further stress on the adrenal glands.
2. Eliminate caffeine. Caffeine stimulates the release of adrenalin which in turn increases the stress response.
3. Relieve and reduce emotional stress as much as possible. Learn stress management techniques and practice them daily.
4. Get to sleep by 10pm every night and sleep in as often as life permits. At least 8 hours of sleep are needed to properly rest the adrenal glands. It is important to not watch television or review work or other stressful material while in bed as these activities may raise cortisol levels.
5. Visit a natural health practitioner and have a specific supplement and treatment protocol designed for your specific needs. There are many vitamins, minerals and nutrients that will help to dramatically improve the state of the adrenal glands and bring the body back to health.