

# DO YOU HAVE THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY DISEASE?

## ADRENAL FATIGUE

### What is adrenal fatigue?

Adrenal fatigue is a collection of signs and symptoms known as a “syndrome,” that results when the adrenal glands function below the necessary level. Most commonly associated with intense or prolonged stress, it can also arise during or after acute or chronic infections, especially respiratory tract infections such as influenza, bronchitis or pneumonia. As the name implies, its paramount symptom is fatigue that is not typically relieved by sleep; but, this syndrome is not a readily identifiable entity. You may even look and act relatively normal during the early onset of adrenal fatigue and may not have any of the obvious signs of physical illness; yet, you may have a general sense of unwellness, tiredness or the “blah” type feelings. People suffering from adrenal fatigue often utilize coffee, colas and other stimulants to get going in the morning and to boost themselves back up during the course of the day.

**Adrenal fatigue can wreck havoc on your life.** In the more serious cases, the activity of the adrenal glands is so diminished, that you may have difficulty getting out of bed for more than a few hours of the day. Changes occur in your carbohydrate, protein and fat metabolism, fluid and electrolyte balance and sex drive. Many other alterations take place at the bio-chemical and cellular levels to try to compensate for the decreased adrenal hormones that occurs with adrenal fatigue. Not only will it cause generalized fatigue and weakness; but also, suppression of your immune system, muscle and bone loss, moodiness or depression, hormonal problems, skin problems and much more.

***The good news is that adrenal fatigue can almost always be relieved!***

### What causes adrenal fatigue?

Adrenal fatigue is produced when your adrenal glands cannot adequately compensate for the demands of stress. Whether these stressor type events are real (actual emergency or trauma) or perceived (anxiety about a potential event), the stress response is surprisingly similar. When you constantly trigger your stress response mechanisms your response mechanisms, these mechanisms begin to become disjointed, improperly regulated and exhausted; sometimes they fail altogether. Three of the most chronic stressors are in balancing blood sugar, chronic inflammation anywhere in the body and mental/emotional stress. Ironically, each of these events is a potential stimulator of cortisol – the adrenal hormone produced to help us recover from stress.

Scientists who study stress say; that the events that cause the most mental and emotional stress usually have 4 similarities. First, we are stressed by things which are new to us. First-time experiences cause you to anticipate how you will feel during that event (pleasure or pain) triggering a stress response. Combined with this is unpredictability, the second feature of common stressors which heighten the stress response. First-time driving lessons on a busy metropolitan freeway are a good example – both for the driver and the instructor! The third component is a sense of threat to your physical well-being or psyche. Then, while not always thought of as stress – the nervous anticipation of someone else’s opinion of you is a threat to your psyche; and therefore, a source of stress. Lastly, common stressors typically cause you to feel you have a loss of control over a situation. A perfect, yet subtle example of this is the person in middle management. They feel their responsibility for performing new tasks while feeling they don’t have control over the outcomes. An unpredictable outcome infers a threat to their job approval and sense of job security. This is a perfect recipe for stress! Not surprisingly, middle managers are often considered to have the highest stress levels in most corporations which leads to higher turn-over, burn-out and poor job satisfaction. In today’s society, working mothers and even more so, single working mothers are faced with every-day stress.

During adrenal fatigue, your adrenal glands function; but, not well enough to maintain optimal hormonal balance because their output of regulatory hormones has been diminished/depleted – usually by over-stimulation. **Over-stimulation of your adrenal glands can be caused either by a very intense single stress or by chronic or repetitive stresses** that have an accumulative effect as we noted above.

### **Who is susceptible to adrenal fatigue?**

Anyone can, and probably will, experience adrenal fatigue at sometime in his/her life. It is estimated that 80 percent of all individuals will, at some time in their life, deal with an acute phase of adrenal fatigue (females more so than males). An illness, a life crisis, or a continuing difficult situation can drain the adrenal resources of even the healthiest person. However, unlike our ancestors, people in today's society live with more constant stress. And, there are factors that make you more susceptible to adrenal fatigue. These include certain lifestyle factors such as: poor diet, substance abuse, too little sleep and/or rest, too many pressures, chronic illness or repeated infections. Instead of occasional, acute demands followed by rest, we are constantly over-worked, under-nourished, exposed to environmental toxins and worrying about others – with no let-up in sight. Thus... more and more chronic adrenal fatigue is being seen.

**How can you tell if your adrenals are fatigued?** You may be experiencing adrenal fatigue if you regularly notice one or more of the following:

- You feel tired for no reason.
- You have trouble getting up in the morning even when you go to bed at a reasonable hour.
- You are feeling run-down and overwhelmed.
- You have difficulty bouncing back from physical/emotional stress or illness.
- You crave salty and sweet snacks.
- You feel more awake, alert and energetic for a short while after 6:00 p.m.

### **Can people experiencing adrenal fatigue feel their best again?**

YES! With proper care most people experiencing adrenal fatigue can experience feeling good again. However, supporting your adrenal glands, promoting healthy adrenal function and maintaining your overall health during stressful times is mandatory for recovery.

Conventional medicine is truly wonderful in treating disease-state conditions. Unfortunately, conventional medicines focus on drugs also tends to suppress early-stage symptoms of some illnesses rather than treat their underlying causes. This is true in the case of adrenal fatigue cortisol testing. In the conventional standard of care, any cortisol level within a very broad range is considered normal and anything outside that range indicates disease.

Cortisol is one of the main hormones produced by the adrenals. The adrenals are walnut-sized glands located on top of each kidney and are important control centers for many of the body's hormones. The outer layer of the gland called the adrenal cortex produces hormones including cortisol, DHEA estrogen and testosterone. The centers of the gland produces adrenalin, the hormone named after the adrenal glands.

The basic task of adrenal glands is to rush all of your body's resources into "fight or flight" mode by increasing production of adrenalin and other hormones. When healthy, your adrenals can instantly increase your heart rate and blood pressure, release your energy stores for immediate use, slow your digestion and other secondary functions and sharpen your senses. However, every challenge to the mind and body creates a demand on the adrenal glands. The list of challenges are endless: lack of sleep, a demanding boss, the threat of losing your job, financial pressures, personality conflicts, yo-yo dieting, relationship turmoil, death or illness of a loved one, skipping meals, reliance on stimulants like caffeine and carbon, digestive problems, over-exercise, illness or infection, unresolved emotional issues from our past or present and more. The result is adrenal glands that are constantly on high-alert and releasing cortisol. What follows is the destructive effect of high cortisol levels due to the over response of the adrenal glands.

### **What is cortisol?**

In its normal function, cortisol helps us meet these challenges by converting proteins into energy, releasing glycogen and counteracting inflammation. For a short time, that's ok; but, at sustained high levels, cortisol gradually tears your body down. Sustained, high cortisol levels can weaken your immune system, destroy healthy muscle and bone, slow down healing and normal cell regeneration and interfere with healthy endocrine function.

Adrenal fatigue could be a factor in many related conditions including: fibromyalgia, hyperthyroidism, chronic fatigue syndrome, premature menopause and others.

### **Should you get an adrenal test?**

In general, if you feel: happy and well, have steady energy and emotions, sleep soundly 7-9 hours a night, wake up feeling rested, recover well from stress and maintain a healthy weight without dieting – then your adrenals are probably doing well!

On the other hand, if your energy lags during the day, if you feel emotionally unbalanced much of the time, can't lose excess weight even while dieting, use caffeine or carbohydrates as "pick-me-ups," or your blood pressure dropped from a sitting to standing position – these are all red flags indicating adrenal deficiency.

### **How can you restore your healthy adrenal function?**

The most effective program combines lifestyle coaching with saliva testing and targeted supplements to help restore your adrenals, thereby, synergistically helping to return you to a less stressful and more productive work and personal life.

### **It has been our experience that most individuals with mild to moderate cases of adrenal fatigue can see significant improvement through these steps:**

- Dietary changes to enrich your nutrition and reduce carbohydrates and stimulants. We also recommend the additional of high quality nutritional supplements including essential fatty acids from fish oil.
- Stress reduction that includes moderate exercise and taking more time for your self. It's helpful to make a list of your stressors, especially those that are constant and develop an action plan to control and reduce these constant stressors.
- Get more rest. Your body needs time to heal.

Typically, after several weeks of using what we entitle, "the adrenal recovery kit," individuals feel better; **however, patients, typically women with more severe symptoms or those who have reached complete adrenal exhaustion; usually need greater intervention.** In our practice, we use the steps outlined above with the added natural support of phosphorylated serines, low dose, natural Dhea if needed and other appropriate supplements that may be warranted via the saliva testing procedure. In our practice, we measure cortisol levels at several points in the day to track the adrenals day/night pattern (called the "diurnal rhythm") using a panel of simple, saliva tests. We prefer to see cortisol elevated in the morning to help you get going, lower but steady throughout the day to sustain energy, and then fall in the evening to support restful sleep.

In the early stages of adrenal dysfunction, cortisol levels are too high during the day and continue rising in the evening. This is called the "hyperadrenia." In the middle stages, cortisol may rise and fall unevenly as the body struggles to balance itself despite the disruptions of caffeine, carbs and other factors; but, levels are not normal and are typically too high at night. In advanced stages, when the adrenals are exhausted from overwork, cortisol will never reach normal levels "hypoadrenia". **Conventional medicine will detect only the extremes of these conditions when damage to the adrenals has already occurred.** Within those extremes, you can feel miserable and still be told your cortisol levels are normal. **But, by responding to early-stage changes of adrenal fatigue as noted through salivary testing, we can reverse the developing dysfunction.**

When an alternative approach to the ongoing usage of medication just to relieve symptoms is desired – our "Healthy Life by Design" program for restoring the body's physiology and healthy function should be a consideration. For additional information see us on the web at: [www.naturalwellnesscentre.net](http://www.naturalwellnesscentre.net). This article is authored by Dr. James R. Grillo, a chiropractic physician and director of Natural Wellness Centre; phone number: 740-687-0279.