By Carol L. Roberts, MD

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rom the moment the alarm rings, to the instant you hit the pillow, exhausted, the demands of your day may be unrelenting. Skipping breakfast, slamming Starbucks, maneuvering kids, husband, traffic, work, boss, meals, home, shopping, - your day is full! Maybe so full that your body ultimately can’t handle the stress. Let’s look inside to see what’s happening.

Perched atop the kidneys are two pyramid shaped glands, the size of walnuts, called the adrenals. Together they produce a variety of hormones, from adrenaline to cortisol to DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone) to aldosterone, which are critical to life and well being. They pour out their hormones in response to stress, raising the pulse, blood pressure, blood sugar, etc., preparing you to flee or to fight whatever threatens you. But when the perceived threat is simply the unrelenting pace of a life out of control, they ultimately tire and can’t produce any more. You find your sleep disturbed; you can’t turn off at night or wake up in the morning. Your energy goes up and down all day. You have mood swings, irritability, you cry at commercials. Your blood sugar rises and falls like the tide, leaving you shaky, dizzy and sweaty at odd times. Nothing interests you anymore. You may even start to have panic attacks – shortness of breath, chest pain and uncontrollable anxiety may drive you to the emergency room, convinced you’re dying of a heart attack. These are a few of the symptoms of adrenal fatigue, also called “burnout.”

Be patient. Recovery may take months to years. Commitment to recovery begins with going to bed by 10 pm, every night! Meals must be consumed in installments, eating healthy (lean protein, vegetables, nuts, some fruit) every 2-3 hours, beginning with breakfast. Drink lots of clean water. Just as important is learning to say NO to unessential tasks. Pamper yourself, rest when you’re tired and take lots of warm baths with relaxing Epsom salts (two cups per tub). Let yourself imagine a less stressful job (or maybe none at all). The great job will come when you invite it into your life. So will the time alone, the supportive partner, the decluttered home, etc. etc. Take Yoga every week in a live class. Learn to meditate. Spend time in nature.

Salt cravings are common. It’s OK to eat salt if your blood pressure is habitually low; your body needs it. Herbs that help are called “adaptogens” and include ginseng, ashwaganda, rhodiola, licorice root, cordyceps and many others, in the morning and again before 2PM. Experiment a little to see which one or combination helps you the most. Decaffeinate your life; don’t kick a dead horse. B complex 50 can be taken twice a day. Sleep is a must, - try homeopathic Coffea Cruda ("like cures like" in this system) or herbal teas from valerian, passionflower, hops and melissa.

Learning what you can and cannot do is imperative. You will find, in the end, that life is a lot more fun when you de-stress and respect your limits. Remember it helps to have a knowledgeable practitioner in your corner who respects what you are experiencing!

Dr. Roberts graduated from Harvard University and the University of Texas Medical School, specializing in Otolaryngology and Emergency Medicine. In 1994, she opened her private practice, Wellness Works, so that she could devote her career to the integration of conventional medicine with the natural and holistic techniques. 813-661-3662; www.wellnessworks.us

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