avert adrenal fatigue

The adrenal glands play a part in regulating mood and energy, and help us deal with stress. Learn how to keep yours healthy

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Product Examples

(from left to right)

MegaFood Adrenal Strength is a popular health food store product that features a range of adrenal-strengthening nutrients, including pantothenic acid and herbs.

NOW Foods Tru-C BioComplex, one of the company’s best-selling products, contains an Ayurvedic source of vitamin C—amla berry—that is thought to be well absorbed and utilized by the body.

Gaia Herbs Adrenal Health helps support adrenal health with a mix of stress-relieving and balancing herbs, such as oats, holy basil, and rhodiola.

DID YOU KNOW?

Adrenal Fatigue: The 21st Century Stress Syndrome
by James L. Wilson is an excellent book for dealing with this all-too-common illness.

Your adrenal glands don’t take up much space, but they sure pack a punch. About the size of a grape, each of your two adrenal glands sits like a tiny pyramid on top of a kidney (ad refers to over; renal refers to kidneys). These diminutive endocrine glands manufacture and secrete potent hormones that are essential to your health and vitality.

Your adrenals enable your body to deal with stress from many sources, including injury, threat, and disease—the well-known fight-or-flight response. They largely determine your moment-to-moment energy. It is also your adrenal glands’ responsibility to keep your body’s reactions to stress in balance so that they are not harmful.

Anti-inflammatory hormones, including cortisol, help to minimize allergic reactions, such as swelling and inflammation. At normal levels, cortisol also helps us by converting proteins into energy and releasing glycogen. But at the sustained high levels brought about by unremitting stress, cortisol gradually tears your body down.

While the poor adrenals are chronically overworked and straining to maintain high cortisol levels, they also lose the capacity to produce sufficient DHEA, which is a precursor hormone to estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone, all of which exacerbate the problem.

Adrenal fatigue is a syndrome that results when the adrenal glands function below the necessary level. This syndrome has been called many different names throughout the past century, such as non-Addison’s hypoadrenia, subclinical hypoadrenia, neurasthenia, adrenal neurasthenia, and adrenal apathy. Although proponents say it affects millions of people around the world, conventional medicine does not recognize it as a distinct syndrome.

The effects can be profound, and include relentless fatigue, especially upon arising, sleep disorders, muscular weakness, dizziness, immune system suppression, slow healing, muscle and bone loss, moodiness, depression, skin inflammation, low libido, weight changes, low blood pressure, low blood sugar, craving salty or sugary foods, concentration difficulty, unexplained hair loss, allergies, masculine characteristics in women, and autoimmune disorders.

Adrenal fatigue may factor into many related conditions, including fibromyalgia, hypothyroidism, chronic fatigue syndrome, arthritis, and premature menopause. It might be more correct to think of it as a part of a syndrome of “chronic endocrine dysregulation,” rather than pointing to the adrenal glands as if they function in a vacuum.
You may look and act relatively normal with adrenal fatigue, yet live with a general sense of unwellness, tiredness or “gray” feelings. People suffering from adrenal fatigue often use caffeine and other stimulants to get going in the morning and to sustain energy throughout the day.

In serious cases, you may have difficulty getting out of bed for more than a few hours per day. As the disorder progresses, changes occur in nutrient metabolism, fluid and electrolyte balance, heart and cardiovascular system, and sex drive.

Many factors can make you more prone to adrenal fatigue. Poor diet, substance abuse, too little sleep and rest, too much stress, lack of exercise, surgery, or a chronic illness or repeated infections, such as bronchitis or pneumonia, can all exhaust these workhorse glands.

The Mayo Clinic describes adrenal fatigue as a label applied to a collection of these same nonspecific symptoms and confirms that it isn’t an accepted medical diagnosis. According to them, the medical term adrenal insufficiency refers to inadequate production of one or more of these hormones as a result of an underlying disease, and that adrenal insufficiency can be diagnosed by blood tests and special stimulation tests that show inadequate levels of adrenal hormones.

Holistically oriented doctors recognize that there is indeed a form of adrenal insufficiency caused by chronic stress—the adrenal glands are unable to keep pace with the demands of perpetual fight-or-flight arousal. As a result, the glands can’t produce quite enough of the hormones needed to feel good.

To get a good handle on adrenal fatigue, there are several laboratory tests available, and it is good to perform a collection of them to get a good assessment. The Adrenal Function Test measures levels of DHEA and cortisol during four periods of the day to determine if there is a hormone imbalance. Jonathan Wright, MD, of the Tahoma Clinic in Kent, Wash., says that the most accurate test of adrenal function is to determine the amounts of natural adrenal steroids in the urine, collected over a 24-hour period, and compare these amounts to those found in a second 24-hour urine sample, taken after an injection of ACTH, a hormone that stimulates the adrenal glands.

Healthful living is critical for adrenal health. To get started on the path, remove stressors such as relationship or financial problems, get plenty of restful sleep, avoid caffeine, and resolve to exercise to capacity several times per week.

**Remedy 1:**

**The Harmonizer. Licorice**

Licorice root is a widely used anti-inflammatory and stamina-supporting herb that is rich in saponins and flavonoid compounds. In fact, it is so useful and so well tolerated that it is the most often used herb in Chinese formulas, where it is called “the universal harmonizer.” The structure of the active ingredient resembles adrenal hormones.

Licorice has a long history in Ayurveda for improving eyesight, strength, sexual potency, and libido. Licorice inhibits an enzyme that normally inactivates cortisol in the kidneys. The net effect is that cortisol...
stays in the blood longer and remains active. The dose is about 500 mg per day. Avoid or take under a doctor’s care if you have high blood pressure.

Remedy 2: The Energizer. Pantothenic acid

This vitamin, also known as B5, is present in all living cells and is important to metabolism. It functions as part of the molecule coenzyme A, which is closely involved in adrenal cortex function, so B5 has come to be known as the antistress vitamin. The adrenals store large amounts of the vitamin, which is necessary for the adrenal glands to produce cortisol and other adrenal hormones. Large doses of pantothenic acid have shown increased ability to withstand stress, and several studies have shown that pantothenic acid even substitutes for adrenal hormones to a certain extent. Wright advises 1 g of pantothenic acid twice a day for adrenal fatigue.

Remedy 3: The Stress Reliever. Vitamin C

Compared to any other tissue, the adrenal glands store high amounts of vitamin C, and vitamin C mobilization in the adrenal glands peaks whenever stress shoots up. The vitamin is also required to produce adrenal hormones in the cortex.

Russian researchers looked at vitamin C to improve adrenal function in a surgical setting, where lung cancer patients were able to better adapt to the stress of surgery, and had normalized levels of cortisol when given vitamin C supplements. Many vitamin C proponents say the greatest benefit comes from a bowel tolerance dose—just short of the dose that produces loose bowels, which is about 15 g per day for most people.