

## **The Adrenal Glands: An Overlooked Key to Your Health**

By

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When people use the word “health,” they usually associate it with concepts like diet, the heart, the digestion, etc. Few people associate it with their adrenal glands. Like most other systems of the body, the adrenal glands require “care and feeding” to remain healthy. Unfortunately, the adrenal glands are among the most overworked and least understood organ systems of the body.

The glands themselves are located on top of the kidneys, just below the rear rib cage. About the size of your thumb, the adrenals secrete several hormones, which are crucial to maintaining good health. For example, glucocorticoids secreted by the adrenals influence carbohydrate, fat and protein metabolism. Mineralcorticoids have important effects on sodium and potassium balance. After menopause, the adrenals secrete sex hormones to help women maintain hormonal balance.

Perhaps the most critical function of the adrenals, however, is their ability to deal with stress. The functions are complex, but can be summarized as preparing the body for “fight or flight,” to confront or escape a physical threat to survival. The brain, the heart, energy production, the immune system, the liver, and muscle and skeletal function are all impacted by the secretion of adrenal hormones, predominantly cortisol, during this process.

When our bodies react physically to “fight or flight,” with physical exertion to escape or confront a threat, the functions normalize in a very short period of time. However, when the stress becomes chronic, as is usually the case in today’s society, all these processes negatively impact one’s health.

In the case of the brain, the flow of blood and nutrients is directed to those portions of the brain having to do with survival, and away from those dealing with judgment, creativity and decision-making. Over time, a number of crucial functions are disrupted by chronic adrenal stress: suppression of pituitary gland function, alteration of neurotransmitter function, and disruption of the feedback process governed by the hypothalamus and pituitary glands. These malfunctions can manifest in many ways, such as decreased libido, cravings for sugar, weight gain, insomnia and depression.

The cardiovascular system is also negatively impacted by chronic adrenal stress. The old adage of “too much stress can kill you” is right on! Increased cortisol has been identified as a major contributing factor to cardiovascular disease.

The digestive and energy producing mechanisms of the body are degraded by chronic adrenal stress, as well. The stress response funnels the body’s energy toward those systems, which allow the organism to survive, primarily the heart, lungs and muscles. These mechanisms also malfunction in the presence of chronic stress. Typically, a

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person overstressing their adrenals will have low energy despite eating enough, be unable to lose weight, and experience digestive upset to some degree, up to and including developing ulcers.

When stress levels become chronic, the operation of the immune system is also impacted. The short-term stress response intentionally suppresses immune system function to allow energy to be used for other purposes. Chronically high cortisol unhealthily suppresses immune system function and renders a person less able to fend off infection and disease. It can also cause atrophy of the thymus gland and lead to a decrease in the body's ability to produce white blood cells.

Chronic adrenal stress also suppresses the liver's detoxification system, for the same reason mentioned above. Since the liver is the major detoxification organ of the body, compromise of this system causes the other detoxification systems to work overtime. People in this situation will sometimes experience constipation, skin conditions such as acne, bloating, sensitivity to food or medications, and unresponsiveness to nutritional supplements or hormonal support.

A normal stress response feeds glucose directly to the muscles. Abnormal or chronic stress will short circuit this process, depriving the muscles of the food they need for energy (and, by the way, shunting glucose to create fat cells!). This can show up as lack of endurance or strength during exertion. Likewise, abnormal stress response can negatively impact bone metabolism and lead to calcium malabsorption, lower bone mineral density and an increased risk for fractures. This is especially crucial for people who have an increased risk for osteoporosis, such as postmenopausal women. Speaking of which, extensive research has demonstrated that the degree of adrenal stress directly correlates to the degree of difficulty women will experience during menopause.

Quite a list, isn't it? Most people don't realize the huge impact the adrenal glands have on their health. But what can be done about it? Quite a lot, in fact.

A combination of diet and lifestyle modification and proper application of nutritional supplementation can go a long way toward addressing these health challenges. Nutritional science has made great strides in offering both modified nutritional protocols and targeted supplementation to help people with these health concerns. For example, it is IMPERATIVE that anyone who is dealing with adrenal stress discontinue the use of caffeine. The primary consequence of chronic caffeine use is the ultimate exhaustion of the adrenal glands. Likewise, cutting edge nutritional companies have made great strides in perfecting sophisticated nutrient delivery systems, which effectively address specific health concerns. An example is the development of phosphatidyl serine creams, which can help restore compromised adrenal function.

Addressing adrenal health is obviously a crucial part of any person's health plan. We can show you the most effective, cost efficient ways to integrate maintenance of adrenal health into your lifestyle so you can enjoy vibrant good health!

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