Adrenal Compromise: The Hidden Cause of Chronic Health Conditions

That old saying, “Big things come in small packages,” can certainly refer to the adrenals, the endocrine glands located on top of the kidneys. These tiny powerhouses are responsible for a myriad of functions within the body, including the production of hormones, some of which are essential for survival. The adrenals are well-known for their function in how the body responds to stress, but their lesser known functions are also involved in the regulation of blood pressure, the secretion of sex hormones, and immune response. Understanding a little about how the adrenals work can bring a greater understanding of why these tiny glands can be at the root of seemingly unrelated health conditions such as allergies, asthma, and reproductive imbalances.

Each adrenal gland has two distinct parts, each responsible for secreting specific hormones vital to life or wellbeing. The *cortex* comprises the outer portion of the gland and produces the hormones hydrocortisone (cortisol), corticosterone, aldosterone, and small amounts of sex hormones. Cortisol plays a critical role in metabolism, cardiovascular function, and blood pressure while its sidekick corticosterone is the VIP hormone that is responsible for healthy immune response and inhibiting inflammation. Aldosterone handles the body’s levels of water and sodium; thus, it is critical for the minute-to-minute regulation of blood pressure. Unlike the adrenal cortex, the *medulla* or inner portion of the adrenal gland secretes the hormones adrenaline and noradrenaline. We can live without them, but when they are disrupted or impaired, quality of life and well-being are compromised, for they play an important role in how we handle life’s stresses and can affect blood sugar levels as

well as blood pressure.

The Body’s Foundation for Good Health and Homeostasis

In conventional medicine, serious disorders including Addison’s Disease, Cushing’s Syndrome, and other diseases of the adrenal cortex are most readily recognized and treated, but imbalances within both the cortex and medulla can slip between the cracks. From the holistic view of things, both portions of the adrenal glands and all of their hormones are taken into account in order to get a bigger picture of what is going on in the body when it comes to depression, anxiety disorders, female hormone imbalance (including PMS), and menopausal havoc. The superficial symptoms of adrenal-rooted illnesses are too often treated with pharmaceutical medications, so the primary cause is never addressed, and a lifetime of suffering can result.

The average individual in our modern times steps on an ambition-fueled treadmill that begins in childhood. Gone are the days when our bodies lived in harmony with the natural cycles of seasons and light. Modern convenience and technological wonders have enabled us to burn the candle at both ends, and despite the fact that most of us claim to enjoy it, our core ability to fight disease has been severely compromised. Epidemic conditions such as chronic allergies, food and environmental sensitivity, asthma, diabetes, ADHD, depression, anxiety, and fibromyalgia were considered rare just a few decades ago. Allopathic and alternative medicine offer many approaches, but according to cutting-edge, holistic-minded medical doctors, resolution will be nowhere in sight as long as the role of adrenal function is ignored.

Adrenal imbalance can manifest as, or play a role in, low immunity, insomnia, infertility, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, pain syndromes, PTSD, eating disorders, and failure to recover

from or conquer addiction. The adrenals may be small and misunderstood, but in essence, there is no quality of life if they are not functioning properly. We must provide them adequate nutrition along with any needed lifestyle changes, supplements, and alternative modalities such as bodywork and clinical aromatherapy. Prolonged physical, mental, and/or emotional stress, lack of rest, poor diet, antibiotics, and continual stimulation of the nervous system via electronics contribute to adrenal compromise. Some people are born with adrenal weakness while others acquire it through life circumstances. Most of us, no matter how health-conscious, are susceptible, but there are many ways we can help the body to restore core vitality and balance. Here are some wonderful ways:

Herbal Allies for Adrenal Support

Due to medication contraindications and other factors, please consult your health care practitioner before taking herbal supplements.

There are many herbal formulas on the market that are purported to boost energy by stimulating the adrenals, but nothing could be more detrimental to compromised adrenal function. Herbs that nourish the glands and support the parasympathetic nervous system can be highly beneficial for regaining the balance of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (hpa).

American White Ginseng

American white ginseng is an excellent herb to support the body’s endocrine system during times of stress. It also promotes healthy immunity and resilience after illness, as it provides nourishment to the adrenals and sex glands. Considered gentler than Korean ginseng, American white is recommended for adrenal exhaustion and non-diabetic

hypoglycemia.

Korean Ginseng

Korean ginseng is an age-old herb that is considered a tonic for the body and an elixir for longevity. It is excellent for improved stamina and balanced hormones, and it is recommended for both men and women.

Tip: *Be sure your source of Korean ginseng is authentic. If the product seems inexpensive, its integrity is usually compromised.*

Damiana

Fragrant and calming, damiana is nourishing to the adrenals and the reproductive system. It is excellent for frayed nerves, low libido, menopausal and perimenopausal discomfort, and hormonal-based anxiety.

Tip: Damiana can be combined with licorice for adrenal support.

White Willow Bark

White Willow Bark is an excellent herb for pain reduction and overall adrenal support. It works best when brewed into a tea.

Caution: *Do not use white willow bark is you are allergic to aspirin. Check with your doctor if you are taking blood thinners.*

Licorice Root

This sweet root supports the adrenal cortex, which in turn, helps the body regulate and utilize cortisol. It also helps the body’s production of DHEA, a hormone that helps the body respond to stress. It is an excellent herb for the nourishment of tired adrenal glands, especially when combined with other

herbs such as ginsengs, juniper berries, or damiana. It can also be very useful for asthmatic or allergic conditions and is excellent for lung support.

Caution: *Avoid licorice if you have high blood pressure and check with your physician if you are taking blood pressure medicine.*

Juniper Berries

These small, purple-black berries from the evergreen shrub support adrenal function, boost immune response and help the organs eliminate toxins. They work especially well when combined with damiana for adrenal health.

Maca

Maca root balances the endocrine system and is especially beneficial to the adrenals and reproductive system. It is wonderful when added to a morning health shake.

Kava Kava

Kava kava root stimulates the production of various neurotransmitters, chemicals that work hand in hand with hormones in the body. It is an excellent herb for anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, mental agitation, and adrenal function.

Tip: *Be sure to purchase kava kava from a reputable source for product quality.*

Caution: *Do not take with alcohol, medications, or antidepressants. Do not take if you have liver or kidney disease.*

Lavender Flowers

Beautifully fragrant lavender helps the body maintain

equilibrium and is unsurpassed during times of stress. It helps the body to find balance and is beneficial for adrenal support, blood sugar regulation, neurotransmitter production, and overall nervous system homeostasis. It is helpful for insomnia, low immunity, allergies, and muscle tension.

Tip: *Lavender is available in bulk form and can be made into a lovely tea. Be sure to purchase non-sprayed/organic flowers.*

Helpful Vitamin Supplements for Adrenal Health

Pantothenic Acid

Pantothenic Acid, also known as B-5, is essential for adrenal support and is highly useful for illness and addiction recovery, times of stress, and lack of energy. B-5 works hand in hand with other B vitamins, especially biotin.

Vitamin B Complex

B complex is the body's ally for better adrenal and nervous system health as well as healthy immunity and overall endocrine function.

Tip: *Look for a formula that has a balance of all B vitamins in equal ratios (50-100 mg.)*

Vitamin C with Bioflavonoids

Like B vitamins, vitamin C is crucial in healthy adrenal and immune function. The adrenals use more vitamin C than any other organ and use it to release hormones. During times of stress, vitamin C is used up in the body at an alarming rate.

Essential Oils and Clinical Aromatherapy

Black Spruce Essential Oil

Blue spruce essential oil is recommended during times of prolonged stress because it decreases excessive cortisol, a stress hormone secreted by the adrenals.

Application: *Apply 2 drops of essential oil undiluted to the soles of the feet daily, preferably in the evening before bed. Can also be added to a bath or foot bath by mixing a few drops* in *Epsom salt or evaporated sea salt.*

Balsam Fir Essential Oil

Balsam Fir Essential Oil brings equilibrium to the endocrine and nervous systems. It is an excellent choice after a long work day or stressful conditions.

Application: *Apply 2 drops of essential oil undiluted to the soles of the feet daily, preferably in the morning and evening before bed. Can also be added to a bath or foot bath by mixing a few drops with Epsom salt or evaporated sea salt.*

Pine Needle Essential Oil and Pine Bark Essential Oil

Pine needle and pine bark essential oils help the adrenals and nervous system restore core vitality and life force.

Application: *Apply 2 drops of essential oil undiluted to the soles of the feet daily. Can also be added to a bath or foot bath by mixing a few drops* in *Epsom salt or evaporated sea salt.*

Juniper Berry Essential Oil

Juniper Berry Essential Oil is invigorating and nourishing to the adrenals, lungs, and immune system. It is excellent for afternoon slumps and hard-to-get-going mornings.

Application: *Apply 2 drops of essential oil undiluted to the soles of the feet daily, preferably in the morning or early evening. Inhaling this oil will help restore energy. It can also be added to a bath or foot bath by mixing a few drops* in *Epsom salt or evaporated sea salt.*

Geranium Essential Oil

Unsurpassed for adrenal support and female hormone balance, geranium essential oil helps the body find equilibrium and supports immunity. It is excellent for PMS, perimenopause, menopause, and adrenal fatigue during hormonal shifts.

Application: *Apply 2-3 drops of essential oil undiluted to the soles of the feet daily. It can also be added to a bath or foot bath by mixing a few drops with Epsom salt or evaporated sea salt.*

Lavender Essential Oil

Lavender is the go-to essential oil for balancing the body, restoring the nervous system, and endocrine support.

Application: *Apply 2 drops of essential oil undiluted to the soles of the feet daily, preferably in the evening before bed. It can also be added to a bath or foot bath by mixing a few drops with Epsom salt or evaporated sea salt.*

Frankincense Essential Oil

Frankincense is an overall balancer for the endocrine system that is especially effective for imbalances of the pituitary, adrenals, and nervous system. It is unsurpassed for adrenal

exhaustion and related disorders of the nervous system and highly useful for chronic anxiety, panic attacks, certain forms of depression, and insomnia.

Application: *Apply 2 drops of undiluted essential oil to the soles of the feet daily, preferably in the morning and evening before bed. Can also be added to a bath or foot bath by mixing a few drops with Epsom salt or evaporated sea salt.*

Ylang Ylang Essential Oil

Yland ylang regulates adrenaline and balances the body during stress and after a fight-or-flight response. It also supports the female reproductive system.

Application: *Apply 2 drops of essential oil undiluted to the soles of the feet daily, preferably in the evening before bed. Can also be added to a bath or foot bath by mixing a few drops with Epsom salt or evaporated sea salt. Place a drop on the hand and inhale for immediate calm to frayed nerves and a racing heart due to anxiety and to regain equilibrium during or after a panic attack. Ylang ylang can also be combined with neroli essential oil for this purpose.*

Lifestyle Changes

Unplug

Unplugging from computer screens, devices, phones, television, and overall electronic distraction for periods of time can have a tremendously positive impact on our overall health. Cortisol levels soar when we are engaged in these activities, especially in the evening.

Remove devices from the bedroom; turn off cell phones during meals. Try to eliminate excuses for not taking time away from electronic devices so the body, namely the brain, can have some down time. Only then can the adrenals restore vitality

and the nervous system kick into parasympathetic mode- the mode that turns off stress hormones, encourages healthy digestion, and promotes better sleep.

Get More Sleep and Rest

Take a cat nap. Go to bed an hour earlier each night. Close your eyes for ten minutes. Look into adrenal support if you suffer from insomnia. The body only heals during REM sleep, and without it, adrenal function is severely impaired and remains so. All the vitamins, supplements, meditation, yoga, and good food in the world cannot do us much good until the body receives adequate rest and sleep. Shifting priorities is essential.

Avoid Conflict and Agitation

Most adrenal-aware doctors agree that emotional stress is a major factor in adrenal exhaustion, and until we change our responses or eliminate the problem entirely, the adrenals cannot recover. Sometimes choices in our lives must be aligned with our higher good. Self-preservation is not selfishness.

Play and Make Time for Pleasure

Playing and seeking healthy pleasure signal the body to step out of the fight-or-flight stress mode. Enjoyable, non-competitive games, activities, and hobbies contribute to our body’s long-term good health.

Conclusion

The adrenals can determine our quality of life, so it is to our benefit that we remember to take care of these precious glands. If we don’t put our health and emotional needs on the to-do list, the adrenals will certainly be our tough teachers who show us what we need to do to get back in alignment. Life is meant to be more than survival, accomplishment, and getting

ahead. Our adrenals remind us that joy, pleasure, rest, and calm are not only the best medicine the doctor can order but our reason for being here. Be well!

For more information check out The Adrenal Fatigue Center.

OLM Recommended Reading:

- *Natural Remedies for Adrenal Fatigue*
- *Understanding Stress, Chronic Stress, and Adrenal Fatigue*
- *Hypothyroidism – Natural Remedies, Causes, and How To Heal the Thyroid*
- *Gluten, Candida, Leaky Gut Syndrome, and Autoimmune Diseases*
- *What Causes Chronic Inflammation, and How To Stop It For Good*

Sources:

- Adrenal Fatigue: The 21st Century Stress Syndrome by James L. Wilson
- Adrenal Fatigue Syndrome: Reclaim your Energy and Vitality with Clinically Proven Natural Programs by Michael Lam
- Chronic Fatigue Unmasked: What You and Your Doctor Should Know About the Adrenal Syndrome, Today's Most Misunderstood, Mistreated and Ignored Health by Gerald Poesnecker
- The Edge Effect: Achieve Total Health and Longevity with the Balanced Brain Advantage by Eric R. Braverman
- Tired of Being Tired: Rescue, Repair, Rejuvenate by Jesse Lynn Hanley
- Multidimensional Aromatherapy by Marlaina Donato