

Adaptogens: Adrenal Rescue!



Cortisol is a powerful “stress hormone” that promotes survival by priming the body during times of alarm/stress. However, we are designed to well weather occasional *episodes* of stress, not sustain ongoing *lifestyles* filled with stress. After strong surges of adrenaline and cortisol, the body needs time to focus and repair. We often don't have the required balance in our lives to allow this latter recovery phase to take place. The impact over time? Exhaustion and chronic disease.

We need sufficient cortisol to drive the body's cellular metabolism and to prime our receptors for all other hormones. In this way, cortisol really is a master hormone. But as is true with most powerful substances there is a sweet spot. Both too little and too much can create issues. **Enter the gift of adaptogenic herbs! Metabolites from these powerful plants can slow down or speed up the metabolism of cortisol to enable us to have more optimal levels.** In summary, adaptogens work to *normalize* cortisol levels – just one of their many potent functions. Adaptogens can help us during the day but also at night.

Sufficient and restful sleep is a critical element of any health improvement plan, especially for weight loss and stress/anxiety reduction. However, many people (especially Americans) struggle to get to sleep and/or to stay asleep to sleep soundly. We sleep better at night when we build energy during the day. However, our stress levels can push our adrenal glands to secrete more cortisol during the day (or even at night!). **While cortisol does protect us when we are stressed, it also drains our energy and can keep us awake at night.** Over time, ongoing stress can deplete our cortisol supply and expose our body to the damaging effects of chronic stress. Adaptogens are safe yet effective choices for building energy and fortunately they are abundantly grown in the earth's garden.

Russian researcher Professor Israel Brekman established the definition of Adaptogens. They increase the general capacity of the human body to adapt to stress and they increase resistance to disease. Their effects are generally not localized to a specific body organ but have a "normalizing" effect (restorative rather than curative) on the imbalances caused by physical or emotional stress. **We focus here on cortisol, but the entire hormonal axis (HPATG) can benefit from adaptogens.** Examples of physical and emotional stress would include depression, anxiety, emotional trauma, noise and occupational tension, biological stress from infection, food allergies or sensitivities, sustained grief, chemical stress from alcohol or drugs, poor nutrient intake, environmental toxins, lack of rest, and even changes in external conditions such as high altitude, extreme climate or irregular day rhythms.

All adaptogens are nourishing to the adrenal gland and work to normalize cortisol function. Some, however, have a more boosting tendency (for hypodrenia) while others have a more calming or suppressive tendency. For general adrenal irregularity (e.g. high levels in the PM and low levels in the AM), a blend of both types usually works well. And as is true with all herbs, **each individual can have unexpected reactions to its use**, so supplementation should be started at lower dose and experimented with to find the best fit for the individual.

Typically Boosting energy impact (for those who are stressed and exhausted)

Licorice – perhaps the most potent in this effect. This herb may also help to reduce elevated testosterone levels (e.g. common in PCOS). The whole licorice extract is needed for this effect (vs. the deglycyrrhizinated (DGL) form used for gut healing). This herb is contraindicated for anyone with unmanaged hypertension.

Cordyceps – a Chinese mushroom that increases tissue uptake of oxygen. Provides energy without mania.

Also Ginseng, Eleuthero.

Generally Calming energy impact (for those who are stressed and wired and/or anxious)

Holy Basil - the most revered of all the Ayurvedic herbs, Holy Basil is not related to the basil we grow in our gardens. Also known as Tulsi, Holy Basil has been used to lower elevated cortisol and regulate blood sugar.

Rhodiola - a premium choice to counteract the mental and physical effects of stress as well as depression. This potent herb helps reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol while enhancing levels of key brain chemicals involved in regulating mood. Plus, rhodiola works naturally to promote synthesis of ATP, the primary energy source for all cells in the body.

Ashwagandha - the herb that has been shown to increase energy and mental alertness during the day has also been shown in research to help you sleep better at night if there is elevated overnight cortisol.

Some examples of adaptogenic herb blends I can recommend which are readily available. Be sure to check with your practitioner to see what combination of adaptogens is likely the best fit for your unique needs.

- Energy Vitality by Gaia Herbs
- Adrenal Health by Gaia Herbs
- Adrenal Optimizer by Jarrow
- AdaptoPhase 1 and 2 by Complimentary Prescriptions

Excerpts from https://bodyecology.com/articles/reduce_your_cortisol_levels.php