

ARE YOU HEADED FOR

BUURN OUT?

Your passion for fitness and your overachieving attitude could be making you sick. Find out if your all-out lifestyle is putting you at risk of adrenal fatigue.

BY TAMMY STROME, RNCP, IFBB PRO

When we think about living a fitness lifestyle we usually imagine having tons of energy, vibrant health, and an amazing body. We usually don't stop to imagine that our commitment to training and nutrition could actually have a negative impact.

Now, don't get me wrong, exercise and on-point nutrition are absolutely essential to good health. However, if you let your passion for fitness go too far, and you stop listening to your body, trouble can arise in the form of adrenal fatigue.

What You Need to Know About Adrenal Fatigue

The adrenal glands are two tiny, walnut-sized little glands that sit on top of your kidneys. They produce numerous hormones that act as chemical messengers, travelling in the bloodstream, and acting on various body tissues to enable them to function properly. One of the primary hormones produced by the adrenal glands is cortisol. This is the main hormone involved in stress management, making your adrenals an essential ingredient for keeping your stress levels in check.

Cortisol also helps regulate metabolism and reduce inflammation. The right amount, at the right time, can help you wake up energized and let you drift off to a good night's sleep. The wrong amount of cortisol can make it very difficult to effectively cope with stress. It can lead to sleep issues, weight gain — especially around the midsection — and a host of other health issues.

When the adrenal glands become overtaxed, a condition known as adrenal fatigue or adrenal exhaustion can occur. This is a stress-related syndrome that results from the adrenal glands, hypothalamus, and the pituitary gland functioning at a level that is below optimum.

Although it is often undiagnosed, experts believe that approximately 80 per cent of the North American population will experience some degree of adrenal fatigue during their lifetime. Dr. Sara Gottfried, a specialist in women's hormonal health, feels

that adrenal fatigue is the single biggest cause of most hormonal imbalances in women, yet it remains one of the most under-diagnosed illnesses. Left untreated, it can set about a cascade of diseases, including cancer and autoimmune disorders.

When it comes to stress management and adrenal fatigue, no two women are alike. We are unique in our life experiences, how we handle stress, our individual biochemical makeup, and our current circumstances. Adrenal fatigue happens when our life is out of balance and we are unable to do an adequate job of managing life's stressors.

Adrenal fatigue isn't the result of a single cause, but is a combination of factors with one dominant situation that tips that balance. Adrenal fatigue usually occurs as the result of the "perfect storm" of physical, psychological, environmental or situational, and emotional situations.

POOR DIET, SLEEP, AND A 24/7 LIFESTYLE CAN TAX AND DEplete THE ADRENAL GLANDS.

For example, early childhood trauma could result in a build-up of psychological stress. It can negatively affect adrenal reserves, however, it may not result in adrenal fatigue until later years when work stresses and poor sleep also enter the picture. Or, the reverse may also be true. Poor diet, sleep, and a 24/7 lifestyle can over-deplete the adrenal glands. Then, a period of intense emotional stress may tip the scale.

SYMPTOMS OF ADRENAL FATIGUE

Think you may be suffering from adrenal fatigue? See how many of these common symptoms you suffer from. There is a lot of individuality with symptoms, however, fatigue tends to be a consistent symptom. If you are exhausted most of the time, and if you have a few of the other symptoms listed below, talk to a naturopath or doctor who is well-versed in adrenal fatigue about diagnosis and treatment.

- ▶ Feel tired upon waking or exhausted by the afternoon
- ▶ Chronic fatigue that doesn't go away despite sleep
- ▶ Difficulty losing fat or increase in body fat combined with muscle loss
- ▶ Joint aches and muscle pain
- ▶ Reduced sweating during workout
- ▶ Night sweats
- ▶ Reduced exercise tolerance
- ▶ Extremely low blood pressure
- ▶ Blood sugar irregularities despite proper nutrition
- ▶ Dizziness
- ▶ Weakness
- ▶ Fasting makes you feel worse
- ▶ Frequent colds and flu
- ▶ Constant thirst and frequent urination
- ▶ Digestive issues such as allergies, gas, bloating, and constipation
- ▶ Menstrual irregularities
- ▶ Low libido
- ▶ Brain fog including memory and concentration problems



"ATHLETES CAN OFTEN CREATE THE PERFECT STORM FOR ADRENAL FATIGUE," says Dr. Kristy Prouse.

ARE YOU AT RISK OF ADRENAL FATIGUE?

The basis of all adrenal fatigue is stress. Over time, it can tax your adrenal glands to the point of causing other health problems such as sleep disorders, weight gain, fatigue, and depression. There are many factors to consider when we look at the stressors than can throw your body out of balance. Ironically, many of the factors that can put you at risk of adrenal fatigue are factors that are looked upon fondly by society.

Athletes can be at a particular risk of adrenal fatigue. "Stress to the body includes not only the obvious physical and emotional stressors, but also the self-induced stressors that can accompany the success-driven personalities of many athletes," says Dr. Kristy Prouse, owner of the Institute for Hormonal Health, in Oakville, ON. "Stress reaches beyond the obvious, to include inflammation from vigorous workouts and oxidative damage from high-level training." Anything to extremes — even healthy things like nutrition and exercise — can have a negative impact if balance is thrown off in the body.

Just like athletes tend to be at an increased risk of adrenal fatigue, there are certain personality types who are more vulnerable. These include ambitious and passionate personalities, who always feel the need to be busy. Independent perfectionists, who set high expectations for themselves are also at risk, as are those with a strong desire to help and please others.

Testing for Adrenal Fatigue

Diagnosing adrenal fatigue can be a challenge, as conventional medicine still has not acknowledged it as a real condition. However, more and more physicians and naturopathic doctors are working in the field of functional medicine, which focuses on the origins of disease, prevention, and living life to its fullest.

If you think you may be suffering from adrenal fatigue, seek out a healthcare practitioner who will take time to look at your lifestyle and go beyond basic healthcare. Some of the leaders in this field include California-based Sara Gottfried, MD, and Canadian doctors Kristy Prouse, MD, OB/GYN (founder of the Institute for Hormonal Health in Oakville, ON), and Natasha Turner, ND (founder of the Clear Medicine Wellness Boutique in Toronto, ON).

Adrenal fatigue can be easily diagnosed with blood work and a hormonal profile test done via saliva or urine collection. While there are a variety of tests, one of the best is the Dry Urine Test for Comprehensive Hormones (DUTCH). It's a 24-hour urine test that requires the patient to urinate on test strips at specific times during the day. These test strips are dried, and sent off to a lab for results that provide a clear and accurate picture of the body's stress hormone levels.

DON'T GIVE UP ON YOUR HEALTH — GET A SECOND OPINION

Don't give up if the first professional you speak with brushes off adrenal fatigue. You know if you're not operating at 100 per cent. If you can't get help the first place you go, look elsewhere — your health is worth it!



PREVENTING ADRENAL FATIGUE

Stay healthy with these tips to manage your stress and maintain a balanced life.

The key to staying healthy is to understand what adrenal fatigue is and to put habits in place that support your adrenal health. Balance and stress management are key. Follow these nine tips to help you live to the fullest, without pushing your adrenals into overdrive.



HELPFUL EXTRAS:

Vitamin, mineral, and nutrient imbalances are common in people with adrenal fatigue, so a quality multi-vitamin, probiotic, fish oil, and greens product can also help.

1. Get Adequate Sleep

Aim to sleep no fewer than seven hours of uninterrupted sleep per night in a dark room.

2. Consider Supplementation

You may wish to consider supplementation with a selection of vitamins and herbs, and/or take a specific adrenal support formula. (Adrenal Life Force by Physica Energetics and Ortho Adapt by AOR are two great choices.) However, it's always best to speak with a professional before embarking on a supplement program. If you have advanced-stage adrenal fatigue, the glandulars and certain herbs could actually stress the adrenals and throw them further out of balance.

Here's a look at supplements that can help with adrenal fatigue:

Adrenal Glandular: Glandulars have been used since the 1920s for healing and health benefits. Adrenal glandulars are used to normalize adrenal function, so they can be an important part of the healing process.

Vitamin C: High stress increases the need for vitamin C. This water-soluble vitamin is needed for the production of all the adrenal hormones, especially cortisol.

Pantothenic Acid (B5): This water-soluble vitamin is used in metabolism and energy production. It helps to enhance adrenal function and modulate inflammation in the body, which can be an issue in adrenal fatigue.

L-Tyrosine: This amino acid is used to make two adrenal hormones epinephrine and norepinephrine, which stimulate the nervous system. Inadequate tyrosine is also associated with lower thyroid function.

Magnesium Citrate or Glycinate: Low magnesium is quite common and it has been shown to trigger a stress response in the adrenals. This mineral plays a role in balancing adrenal function.

Rhodiola: This plant is classified as an adaptogen because it helps the body adapt to stress. It has been shown to lower the release of cortisol, but could be stimulatory for those with advanced adrenal fatigue.

Licorice Root: This herb has been shown to support healthy cortisol levels and may reduce symptoms of adrenal fatigue such as exhaustion, pain, and brain fog.

Ashwagandha: This is another adaptogenic herb that lowers cortisol levels and supports thyroid function.

3. Eat Naturally

Focus on eating only natural foods that are certified organic whenever possible. Avoid processed foods and buy hormone- and antibiotic-free meat. Healthy eating promotes healing.

4. Breathe Deeply

Learn how to breathe deeply using "diaphragmatic breathing." Most people breathe in the upper part of their airway. This has been shown to raise stress hormone levels. Practising deep breathing provides more oxygen to your tissues and brain for healing, health, and optimal function.

5. Exercise in Moderation

If you're training for a fitness competition, you need to be in a situation where you can get proper rest and nutrition. If you work 50 hours a week, sleep five hours a night, and are running around after kids, then training for a competition is

definitely going to stress your body. Adrenal fatigue is cumulative. You can get away with doing one thing. It occurs when a host of stressful activities combine to create the perfect storm.

6. Moderate Your Workload

The "hustle and grind" is a recipe for burnout. Misguided individuals can take things to extremes. Moderate your work with proper leisure and family time for longevity over immediate success.

7. Drink Lots of Water

Dehydration is an unnecessary stress on the body. Drink a minimum of one ounce a day for every kilogram of body weight. For example, if you weigh 59 kilograms (130 pounds), you should drink a minimum of 59 ounces or 1.75 litres of water a day. If you sweat a lot, you will need more.

8. Think Positively

Changing your mindset can take some tough inner work, but it's essential. Let go of your anger and forgive. Give yourself permission to not be perfect and learn to ask for help. And above all, learn to love yourself unconditionally.

9. Listen to Your Body

When your body gives you signs that it needs to rest, please listen. Your health should be your number-one priority. **EW**

ONLINE QUIZ

Are you unknowingly creating the perfect storm for adrenal fatigue? Log onto insidefitnesswomen.com and take our quiz to find out.