

# Stress less

BY SARAH LUCK

STRESS CAUSES MORE HEALTH PROBLEMS THAN EITHER CIGARETTES OR ALCOHOL, YET WE ACCEPT IT AS PART OF LIFE THESE DAYS. TO HELP YOU DEAL WITH STRESS AND LIVE A HEALTHIER LIFE, HERE IS A NATURAL PERSPECTIVE ON STRESS MANAGEMENT.

Stress is so common these days that it is almost accepted as normal. In fact, the term "stress" is so overused that it has lost any real meaning, yet the list of diseases and health problems associated with stress reads longer than those caused by cigarette smoking and alcohol: heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, depression, anxiety, insomnia, headaches, hormonal problems such as irregular periods & PMS, hair loss, skin problems, digestive problems, cancer and a suppressed immune system resulting in increased infections and allergies.

Add to this list the fact that stressed people tend to indulge in unhealthy behaviour such as smoking, drinking, drug abuse and over-eating and it's obvious that stress is seriously bad for your health and wellbeing. So exactly what is stress and how can it possibly make you so sick and unhappy?

## Long-term effects of high cortisol include:

- Increased blood pressure
- Poor memory
- Decreased minerals in your bones
- Suppressed thyroid function
- Lowered immunity and slow wound healing
- Increased inflammation
- Increased breakdown of muscles
- Blood sugar imbalances
- Increased abdominal fat

For your caveman ancestors, stress was caused by an immediate fight-or-flight situation, such as the appearance of a sabre-tooth tiger or a run-in with a rival caveman resulting in either a fight to the death or running like crazy in the opposite direction. In either case, the stress was over within a few hours (for better or worse!). Your body's response to stress has not changed much since then, but the types of stress it must respond to have changed significantly. It's common now to spend days, weeks, months and years in a state of

stress, battling work deadlines, family crises, mortgage repayments, study and exams.

When you consider that your body reacts to peak-hour traffic in the same way your ancestors reacted to being stalked by the sabre-tooth tiger it's easy to see why road rage is such a common phenomenon or why you feel so tense and edgy by the time you finally get to work each morning. The end result is your body is continually flooded with chemicals and hormones designed purely for short-term life-or-death situations. These fight-and-flight hormones are adrenalin and cortisol.

## YOUR ADRENAL SYSTEM

Your adrenal system consists of two small glands: the adrenal glands that sit on top of your kidneys and produce your fight-and-flight hormones, adrenal and cortisol. Your adrenal glands also produce small amounts of testosterone, oestrogen and hormones responsible for salt and water regulation. DHEA is also produced in your adrenal glands and is the building block for oestrogen and

testosterone and also has a protective action on your immune system and brain. High levels of cortisol are associated with lowered levels of DHEA, which may produce further hormonal imbalance in oestrogen and testosterone.

Adrenalin, also known as epinephrine, is a short-acting hormone released in response to any threat. Very fast-acting nerves from your brain trigger the release of adrenalin into your bloodstream. Loud noises, bright lights and excitement can also trigger the release of adrenalin. Adrenalin is also used as a drug to treat cardiac arrest and anaphylactic shock from life-threatening allergies to peanuts, bee stings etc.

Adrenalin prepares your body for action by increasing oxygen and fuel to your brain and muscles while switching off non-essential functions such as digestion and your immune system until the emergency is over. It reduces blood supply to your skin in order to help prevent blood loss if you're injured.

Too much adrenalin over a long period of time literally wears your body out. If you're not using your adrenalin for fighting or running you'll be left feeling tense, jittery, nervous and jumpy with a hair-trigger nervous system. If the stress continues, a secondary hormone, cortisol, is released to help your body cope with the increased demands of prolonged fight and flight. Cortisol release is controlled by your pituitary gland, making it slower to kick in, but its effects are much longer-acting and include reducing the ability to feel pain and increasing blood pressure and blood sugar.

Caffeine, sleep deprivation, prolonged exercise, skipping meals and commuting to work have all been shown to increase cortisol levels. The class of medicines known by most people as steroids, such as cortisone, are based on cortisol. Used long-term or in high doses, steroids suppress the function of your adrenal glands.

Adrenalin and cortisol prepare your body for survival by enhancing your ability to fight or run and switching off organs and systems concerned with long-term survival in order to conserve energy until the crisis is over. Body systems suppressed by stress include:

- Circulation to your skin, hands and feet
- Immune system
- Digestion
- Reproductive system

## ADRENAL FATIGUE AND CORTISOL

While we think of cortisol as purely a stress hormone, it's also essential for maintaining day-to-day health. However, problems can occur when your adrenal glands produce too much or too little of the hormone. Your cortisol should be at its highest peak at around 6am to help energise your body and brain for the day. It then slowly decreases over the day and is at its lowest ebb by 10pm at night to allow you to sleep restfully and your body to heal and regenerate during sleep. This rhythmical cycle is easily →



It's helpful to separate all the different stressors in your life into different categories.



## Causes of adrenal fatigue

According to Dr James Wilson, it's not just emotional stress that causes adrenal fatigue. Other contributing factors include:

- Lack of sleep
- Using stimulants such as caffeine, sugar and cigarettes to keep going when tired
- Poor food choices [lack of fruit and vegetables, high sugar, low fibre, white flour and too many processed foods]
- Skipping meals
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Lack of time and not prioritising time for relaxation and rest
- Shift work
- Major surgery
- Severe burns, including sunburn
- Head trauma
- Repeated or excessive exposure to toxins and chemicals
- Chronic pain

underactive adrenal glands, but are not sensitive enough for mild deviations from normal. The disadvantage with blood tests is that around 95 per cent of cortisol in your blood is attached to proteins that render it inactive. Most cells respond only to free cortisol and this is where salivary cortisol testing has the advantage over blood tests. Hormones in your saliva are typically bioavailable or active hormones, giving a better indication of true hormonal balance. Another advantage over a single blood test is that a salivary sample is taken four times over the day, starting at 7am and finishing at 10pm, giving you a clearer picture of your cortisol levels over the whole day.

## YOUR STRESS LOAD

Your body cannot tell the difference between stress caused by worry about bills or relationship woes and that caused by toxic chemicals, lack of sleep or poor food choices. The end result is the same: activation of your fight-and-flight hormones and the health consequences that follow.

Paul Chek, holistic personal trainer, lifestyle coach and author of *How to Eat, Move and Be Healthy*, also believes exercise can be a significant source of stress to the body. Excessive exercise or the wrong type can stimulate those very same stress hormones induced by a charging sabre-tooth tiger. Chek believes that before embarking on any exercise program an individual should first take into account their cumulative stress load from all sources — physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

Imagine you've had a hard day at the office or at home with the kids. You ran out of time, so you skipped lunch or grabbed a coffee and a muffin to keep yourself fuelled; you then popped a few painkillers to silence that nagging pain in your lower back caused by poor posture, weak tummy muscles and too many hours at the computer, before rushing out the door to get to the gym so you could exercise under harsh fluorescent lighting to blaring music. Your body was already stressed and your adrenal glands whipped into overdrive before you even got to the gym.

Forcing your body into intensive exercise in spite of poor posture, muscular weakness and existing pain and injury combined with bright lights and loud noise pushes your already over-stressed body closer towards adrenal fatigue and the myriad health problems associated with stress.

When your stress load is high, Chek recommends a *work-in* as opposed to a *work-out*. A work-in is simply a form of exercise that creates energy for your body instead of expending it. Examples of work-ins include walking meditation, tai chi, gentle stretching and yoga.

## HOLISTIC STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress is an unavoidable part of life and it need not be all bad. As with all things, it comes

down to balance. Before you begin to tackle your stress levels, you first need to add up your total stress burden. It's helpful to separate all the different stressors in your life into different categories so you can view them objectively, prioritise and begin to make changes. If your stress load in one particular area is high and it's difficult or not practical to make changes, you can look at minimising other forms of stress to reduce your total stress burden. There are six main types of stress that we are exposed to each and every day:

disrupted by stress, leading to alterations in hormonal balance.

During the initial phases of stress, cortisol production is increased, forcing your adrenal glands to work harder. Cortisol is produced from cholesterol, which is why stress can increase your cholesterol — your adrenal glands are demanding more and more building materials to keep up the production of cortisol. This is fine if the stress is limited to only a few days or even weeks, but if it continues for months or years, eventually your adrenal glands become exhausted and can no longer produce sufficient amounts of cortisol to maintain even day-to-day health, producing a state known as adrenal fatigue or burnout.

The term adrenal fatigue was first coined by Dr James Wilson, author of *Adrenal Fatigue, the 21st Century Stress Syndrome*, to describe a syndrome not currently recognised by mainstream medicine that includes tiredness and fatigue, especially in the mornings and even after a good night's sleep, failure to bounce back from stress or illness and poor resistance to infections for which no underlying reason could be found. He also recognised that many of the health problems associated with intense or chronic stress were due to the body attempting to adapt and compensate for the adrenal fatigue.

Cortisol imbalance and adrenal exhaustion can also produce other hormonal problems by reducing your body's ability to produce oestrogen and testosterone. This is especially important for women during and after menopause when oestrogen produced by your adrenal glands becomes even more valuable. Adrenal exhaustion will make for a much bumpier transition through menopause.

Blood tests are useful for diagnosing extremes of overactive and

Hypoglycaemia, or low blood sugar, probably has the single largest dietary influence on how well you cope with stress.



- Nutritional stress
- Physical stress
- Chemical stress
- Mental and psychic stress
- Electromagnetic stress
- Thermal stress

### NUTRITIONAL STRESS

Aside from artificial colourings, flavours, preservatives, pesticides, hormones, stabilisers and the like that are found in most processed foods, the two most common nutritional stressors are nutrient deficiencies and hypoglycaemia, or low blood sugar.

Nutrient deficiencies can occur as a result of stress and illness or, more commonly, by just not getting enough nutrients from your food. Your food simply does not contain the nutrients it should, partly because of modern farming practices that deplete the soil. Storage and shipping of fresh fruits and vegetables also results in nutrient loss. Digestive problems can interfere with your absorption of nutrients. If you suffer from digestive problems such as bloating, constipation, reflux or allergies, taking a good digestive enzyme with food and supplements can help to ensure you're absorbing more of the good stuff.

Nutritional deficiencies in any of the following will contribute to high stress:

- Magnesium and calcium are calming to a frazzled nervous system. Deficiencies can result in increased muscle tension, sleep problems and anxiety — 500mg of each is recommended per day.
- Vitamin B6 and B5 help to support adrenal function. Look for a B complex that contains around 50mg of B6 and 500mg of B5 (pantothenic acid).
- Vitamin C also helps to support healthy adrenal gland function as well as helping to prop up a flagging immune system due to chronic stress. Stress really does burn up your vitamin C, which is why it's common to come down with a cold or flu after a stressful event such as a car accident.
- Protein, vitamin B2 and choline deficiency can affect your pituitary gland's ability to orchestrate your body's response to stress. Choline is a member of the B vitamin family and is found in many B complex formulations. Look for one that contains at least 50mg of both choline and B2.
- Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish and flaxseed oils can help relieve depression and improve mental focus and clarity.
- While a deficiency of the amino acid tyrosine is unlikely, it can be used to support adrenal gland and thyroid function during periods of stress.



Your body cannot tell the difference between stress caused by worry about bills or relationship woes and that caused by toxic chemicals, lack of sleep or poor food choices.

Hypoglycaemia, or low blood sugar, probably has the single largest dietary influence on how well you cope with stress. When your blood sugar or blood glucose drops, your fuel-deprived brain interprets this as a stress and stimulates your adrenal glands — remember that adrenalin and cortisol both increase the level of sugar or glucose in your blood to fuel your brain and muscles through a crisis. What you experience is a craving for junk food and a sudden surge of stress hormones putting your nervous system on red alert and ensuring that


you react to even small stressors like they're life-and-death situations. Hypoglycaemia produces symptoms of nervousness, anxiety, mood swings, feeling jittery, tremors, cold sweats, nausea and depression. If you experience these symptoms and they're relieved by eating, you can cut a deal of your stress by changing your eating habits.

Skipping breakfast, eating a high sugar breakfast or replacing breakfast with coffee and a muffin is a guaranteed recipe for hypoglycaemia later in the day. Simply by changing your breakfast, you will improve your energy levels and your ability to cope with deadlines, tired and cranky children or a demanding boss for the rest of the day.

Avoid high sugar breakfasts such as cereals, breakfast bars, honey or jam on toast, muffins and banana bread and instead look for low-glycaemic-load (low-GL) and high-protein alternatives such as homemade Bircher muesli, fruit and yoghurt, poached eggs with toasted rye bread or some good-quality whey protein blended with antioxidant-rich berries.

Follow breakfast with a healthy mid-morning snack a few hours





Look to your food to help ease some of the physical symptoms of stress.

## Limit your exposure to toxic chemicals by avoiding chemical-laden cleaning products, ensuring your house has adequate ventilation and choosing your skin products and cosmetics wisely.

later and you'll be setting yourself up for a stress-free afternoon. Healthy morning tea options include fresh fruit and nuts, boiled egg, yoghurt or cucumber, or carrot and celery sticks served with homous, avocado, goat's cheese or cottage cheese.

A high-protein snack before bed can help stop your blood sugar dropping early in the morning, which results in a surge in stress hormones that rouses you from sleep and makes returning to sleep very difficult. Stabilising your blood sugar levels also helps to reduce cravings for sugary and processed foods, making it easier to stick to a healthy diet without the added stress of cravings sabotaging your efforts. It will also help you maintain a healthier weight without the need for extreme dieting. A rapidly expanding waistline is a significant source of stress for most of us.

### PHYSICAL STRESS

Both too much and too little exercise creates stress for your body. Lack of exercise and movement not only contributes to weight gain but the sluggish circulation turns your body into the equivalent of a stagnant pond. On the other hand, too much exercise can suppress your immune system, leading to recurring infections and injuries that heal slowly and improperly. The key is moderation and balance. If you're already highly stressed, follow Paul Chek's advice and opt for a gentle work-in instead of a 10km run. The lower your total stress load, the better your body will handle more intensive exercise. If you're addicted to running, you need to minimise all your other stresses or you'll simply be wearing your body out faster.

An often overlooked source of physical stress is poor posture. Unhealthy posture creates pain and makes you more susceptible to injury. Posture also affects breathing and slouching can compress your vital organs, reducing their circulation and function.

Start becoming aware of the physical manifestations of stress. Dr Archibald Hart, author of *The Hidden Link between Adrenalin and Stress*, recommends making time to relax, especially during busy days. He counsels the importance of consciously relaxing your body whenever you start to feel worried or tense or are anticipating a stressful event. By relaxing the physical body, you will soon train your mind to follow suit. Relax your forehead and drop your jaw, relax your hands and stomach muscles and consciously slow your breathing by focusing on long, slow exhalations. Invest in a guided progressive muscle relaxation to learn to release all muscle tension and practise it each night before bed.

### CHEMICAL STRESS

Chemical stress comes in the form of toxic chemicals but also imbalances in essential bodily chemicals such as hormones, enzymes and neurotransmitters. The sabre-tooth tiger may be extinct, but we are exposed to many thousands of chemicals today

that our ancestors never had to deal with. Many of these chemicals are like extra-terrestrial substances from space — they are never found occurring naturally, so we have not evolved adequate detoxification methods to deal with them.

Limit your exposure to toxic chemicals by choosing organic, unprocessed foods wherever possible, investing in the best-quality water filter you can afford, avoiding chemical-laden cleaning products, ensuring your house has adequate ventilation and choosing your skin products and cosmetics wisely. Regular detoxification and use of saunas can also help to minimise the burden of chemical stress. Eliminating nutritional stress will help to ensure your body has the nutrients it needs to manufacture hormones, enzymes and other essential chemicals it requires to maintain health.

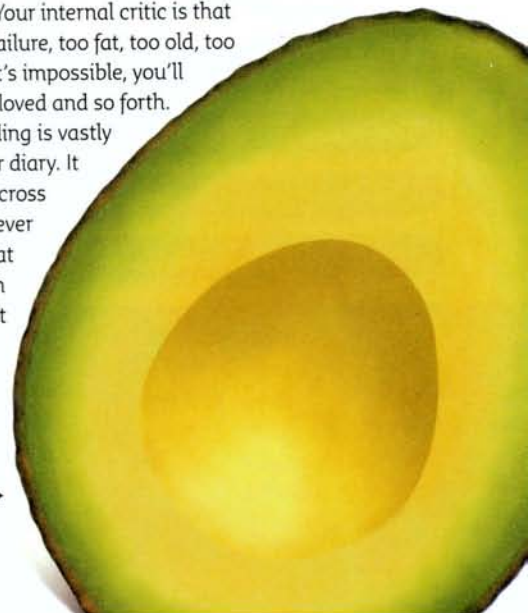
### MENTAL AND PSYCHIC STRESS

This is the form of stress most people are familiar with, but without some forms of positive mental and psychic stress we would not grow and develop into balanced human beings. Positive forms of mental stress include overcoming adversity, achieving a challenging goal and even learning to say no to damaging foods, people and lifestyle choices. Some of the more damaging forms of mental and psychic stress include:

- Perfectionism
- Focusing on what you don't want instead of what you do want
- Feeling powerless
- Staying in no-win situations
- Having a fear of making mistakes
- Feeling guilty about relaxing and taking time for yourself
- Surrounding yourself with negative people
- Being unable to say no

Mental and psychic stress is often one of the hardest stresses to resolve for most people. Many of the thought processes and behavioural patterns behind this type of stress stem from our reactions to past stressful events as far back as childhood. Activities such as flow-of-consciousness journal-keeping can help you to become more conscious of the underlying drivers that contribute to mental stress. In her best-selling book *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron recommends practising the "morning pages", a form of flow-of-consciousness journaling, as a way of creating clarity and decreasing the power your internal critic has over you. Your internal critic is that nagging voice that tells you're a failure, too fat, too old, too young, too ugly, too stupid, that it's impossible, you'll never get healthy, you'll never be loved and so forth.

Flow-of-consciousness journaling is vastly different from a regular journal or diary. It simply means moving your pen across the page and writing down whatever happens to be in your mind at that particular moment. If you happen to be thinking, "I don't know what to write. This is stupid. Why am I doing this? What on earth am I going to write?", this is exactly what goes onto the paper until you have filled three A4 pages with writing. It's not a record →





## The four doctors

According to Paul Chek, the best way to manage your stress and enjoy a long, healthy and disease-free life is to ensure you spend some time each day with the four doctors: Dr Diet, Dr Quiet, Dr Happiness and Dr Movement.

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet, avoiding chemically laden foods and sugar.
- Drink sufficient pure, filtered water each and every day.
- Limit or avoid stimulants such as caffeine.
- Balance mental stress and excitement with quiet down time.
- Slow down and stop rushing by developing good time management.
- Get eight to nine hours of solid, uninterrupted sleep every night.
- Play, laugh, smile and engage in activities that bring you happiness and pleasure.
- Move your body to prevent stagnation and maintain circulation.

of things you have done that day or plans for tomorrow. Put simply, flow-of-consciousness journaling is a form of "brain drain" or "mind detoxing". In fact, this type of journal-keeping is more like a meditation practice than a record of events. Done daily on a regular basis, it allows you the insight and strength to effect positive change in your life. If you're a morning person, write it in the morning, and if you're an evening person it will be best to do it at night before bed.

## ELECTROMAGNETIC STRESS

You are surrounded by extremely low-frequency (ELF) radiation, which, like chemical stress, your ancestors never had to deal with. You can't see, hear, smell or even feel it, making it easy to dismiss it as a source of stress. But ELF radiation disrupts your body's own electromagnetic fields, creating biological stress as well as altering hormonal and immune systems.

Try to limit your exposure as much as possible by avoiding wireless technology and investing in a device that helps to shield radiation emitted from your mobile, computer and laptop. For some positive electromagnetic exposure, spend some time each day walking barefoot on grass or sand in order to connect with the earth's electromagnetic field. Sun exposure in moderation is also a positive form of electromagnetic stress.

## THERMAL STRESS

Extremes of temperature can create a state of stress for your body. Air-conditioning in the office set too high in summer or sleeping with the electric blanket switched on all night can contribute to your stress burden. You may have already noticed that coughs, colds and runny noses are much more common during the change of seasons, when the temperature swings from 30°C down to 15°C from one day to the next. If your body is already highly stressed, the fluctuating temperatures can be the final straw, resulting in a respiratory infection due to a suppressed immune system. Burns, including severe or repeated sunburn, are another type of thermal stress. This is part of the reason why too much sun can bring on an attack of cold sores in susceptible people.

## ARE YOU AN ADRENALIN JUNKIE?

Adrenalin makes you feel good — so good, in fact, that it can become seriously addictive. You may even be an adrenalin junkie without realising it. As your adrenals become more and more fatigued, your body becomes more tired without adrenalin and cortisol to prop it



Licorice root helps recover from stress.

up. This can result in a tendency to manufacture stress or engage in stressful activities as a way of keeping the stress hormones flowing. The stress response is an emergency system and your body tries hard to balance time spent in this energy-consuming state with one requiring less energy. The old saying, what goes up must come down, is a universal law that applies to time spent fuelling your body with adrenalin. Adrenalin arousal is almost always followed by a withdrawal period characterised by extreme restlessness, irritability, inability to relax, obsessing about everything that remains undone, short attention span and a vague feeling of depression while not engaged in activity.

Depending on how long and intense your adrenalin high was, the withdrawal period may last a few days up to a week or even longer. If you answer yes to any of the following, then according to Dr Arcl Hart, there is a strong possibility you are an adrenalin junkie:

- Would you rather engage in your activity than sleep?
- When you stop your activity, do you feel restless or low?
- Does your activity help you forget your problems?
- Whenever you feel depressed, do you turn to your activity to help yourself feel better?

Anything that stimulates the release of adrenalin has the capacity to become addictive, including running, dieting, caffeine and arguments.

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## HERBAL MEDICINE FOR STRESS

The plant world offers some wonderful herbs that are beneficial during times of increased stress or for sufferers of adrenal fatigue. Adaptogens are a group of herbal remedies that quite literally help your body resist and adapt to physical, chemical and emotional stress by helping to support and maintain the adrenal response. They can help to delay and minimise adrenal fatigue during times of intense or prolonged stress. They also can be used to assist in recovery from adrenal fatigue. Most adaptogen herbs are also powerful antioxidants. Some of the better-known herbs and adaptogens include:

**LICORICE ROOT** (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) helps extend the action of cortisol, exerting a strong effect on the adrenal glands. Licorice root can be used to assist in the recovery not only from stress but also from the suppressive effects of

steroid medication such as cortisone. High doses of licorice over a long period of time may increase blood pressure.

**KOREAN GINSENG** (*Panax ginseng*) assists in improving stamina, concentration, healing and work efficiency during times of stress. Panax works very quickly to restore energy levels, but it should be taken if you suffer from acute anxiety or consume large amounts of coffee. As it is quite stimulating, it is best used in states of underactive adrenal glands such as adrenal fatigue rather than during acute stress. In traditional Chinese medicine, panax is also used to treat low libido in men, a common side effect of excess stress.

**SIBERIAN GINSENG** (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) is more suited for long-term use than Korean ginseng, making it ideal for assisting



in recovery from adrenal fatigue. It helps to improve vitality and stamina and increases resistance to disease and infection. It combines well with licorice root.

**MACA** (*Lepidium meyenii*) comes from Peru where it is made into a flour and consumed liberally as a food. Rich in nutrients, maca is particularly useful when chronic stress has resulted in low oestrogen or testosterone. This is a gentle remedy well suited to long-term use.

**RHODIOLA** (*Rhodiola rosea*) is particularly well suited to mental and emotional stress as it helps to alleviate depression and elevate mood as well as being a stimulant. Research suggests it may help to optimise levels of the feel-good neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine as well as having adaptogenic properties in helping to improve resistance to stress.

**ASHWAGANDHA** (*Withania somnifera*), also known as Indian ginseng, is an important herb in Ayurvedic Indian medicine. It has a very mild sedative and calming action, making it well suited for use during acute stress when the adrenal glands are overactive. It's also used in herbal medicine for underactive thyroid. Ashwagandha is a very safe and gentle herb that can even be given to small children.

**DAN SHEN** (*Codonopsis pilosula*) has many of the health effects of the ginsengs but without any stimulating properties, making it ideal for acute stress and anxiety. It helps to increase white blood cells and strengthen digestion and immunity. Dan shen is a wonderful adaptogen tonic for after illness or surgery.

Nervous system restoratives are another class of herbal remedies that may assist in restoring and nourishing a frazzled and debilitated nervous system. They help to improve the tone and function of the nervous system and should be used over several weeks to months for best results. They combine well with herbal adaptogens. Commonly used herbal nervous system restoratives include oat seed, passionflower, skullcap, St John's wort, chamomile, lavender, hops and lemonbalm.

## BACH FLOWER REMEDIES FOR STRESS

Bach flower remedies offer an incredibly gentle yet effective way of helping you move through periods of stress, mentally and physically. They can safely be used for babies, children, the elderly and the very ill. They are also safe to use in conjunction with medication if you are unsure about interactions with herbal remedies. Several remedies can be combined for best results.

**OAK** helpful for those who plod on, even when exhausted, or who are driven by a sense of duty and responsibility.

**PINE** of benefit for those who are driven by guilt and self-reproach, or who never feel that anything they do is quite good enough.

**IMPATIENS** should be taken by those who take on too much work and are always stressed by not having enough time. They are often snappy, irritable and impatient.

**VERVAIN** can be used by people who cannot stop their minds from over-thinking, which can often result in muscle tension and sleep problems.

**AGRIMONY** for classic adrenalin addicts who are active to keep themselves from dealing with their internal pain.

**WHITE CHESTNUT** for a worrywart, always worrying and obsessing about what might go wrong.

**ELM** for those who feel completely overwhelmed and unable to cope with stress.

**OLIVE** for those who are mentally and physically drained from a long period of stress. ☺

Sarah Luck is a natural health consultant specialising in hormonal imbalance, children's health, pregnancy and breastfeeding. She practises from Levity Health in Bondi Junction, Sydney, and Sage Beauty in North Bondi. W: [www.thenaturalhealthhub.com](http://www.thenaturalhealthhub.com), [www.goodhealthnaturally.nourished.com.au](http://www.goodhealthnaturally.nourished.com.au)

## HOW HEALTHY ARE YOUR ADRENAL GLANDS?

Are your adrenals exhausted and worn out or are they working overtime? Do you need to calm them down or build them up?

### Adrenal fatigue checklist

- ☐ Easily frazzled and fly off the handle at small things
- ☐ Cannot tolerate loud noises
- ☐ Dizziness when standing or low blood pressure
- ☐ Catch every respiratory infection that goes around or take a long time recovering from minor infections
- ☐ Difficulty recovering from jet lag
- ☐ Quivering tongue
- ☐ Dark circles under eyes
- ☐ Cannot tolerate confrontation
- ☐ Low libido
- ☐ Exhausted in the mornings, even after a good night's sleep
- ☐ A night owl, finding it difficult to wind down and sleep at night
- ☐ Hypoglycaemic or low blood sugar
- ☐ Dry skin
- ☐ Skipping meals causes anxiety, headaches, the shakes or leave you angry and irritable
- ☐ Craving salt and salty foods
- ☐ Sensitive to caffeine, alcohol, chemicals and strong smells
- ☐ Tired but wired (exhaustion coupled with a sense of anxiety making it difficult to relax and rest)

If you scored high on the adrenal fatigue checklist, you need to focus on remedies and foods that tonify and nourish your adrenal glands. Herbal remedies such as licorice root, ginseng and withania can help to restore your energy levels. Avoid sugar, fruit juices and refined foods while increasing good-quality fats and protein-rich foods such as eggs, fish and organic chicken. It's important to never skip breakfast and you'll do best if you graze regularly throughout the day.

### High adrenal checklist

- ☐ Heart palpitations
- ☐ High blood pressure
- ☐ Easily confused and frazzled when under pressure or rushed
- ☐ A sense of anxiety
- ☐ Tendency to be aggressive and intolerant
- ☐ Unhealthy skin (infected, injured or bruised easily)
- ☐ Excessively oily skin and acne
- ☐ Increased facial and body hair in woman
- ☐ Problems getting to sleep or staying asleep
- ☐ Sugar cravings
- ☐ Restless legs
- ☐ Increased muscle tension and discomfort

If you scored high on the checklist, you need to focus on calming your overactive adrenal system before it burns out. Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, sugar, artificial sweeteners and MSG. Calming herbal remedies such as zizyphus, skullcap and passionflower can be helpful for sleep problems. Be sure to take extra B vitamins to help your nervous system, as well as B5, B6, vitamin C and the amino acid tyrosine for your adrenal glands. Aerobic exercise is a good way to burn off excess stress hormones that can otherwise leave you feeling anxious, jittery, angry or panicked. Walking meditation or yoga often work best for high adrenal people who may find themselves bored, restless or exhausted during more sedate forms of meditation. Try carrying a small bottle of pure lavender essential oil with you; whenever you start to feel stressed, anxious or overwhelmed, inhale deeply from the bottle for an instant sense of calm and relaxation.