

# Chapter 1

## Facing Adrenal Fatigue

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Examining how the adrenal glands work
  - ▶ Noting the factors and symptoms of adrenal fatigue
  - ▶ Getting screened for adrenal fatigue
  - ▶ Investigating potential causes of adrenal fatigue
  - ▶ Treating adrenal fatigue
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**I**f you're reading this book, you're likely sick and tired of feeling sick and tired, and you want to know why you feel that way. You know something isn't right, and you're looking for reasons as to why you feel so run down. You may have grown frustrated with your healthcare providers' inability to pinpoint why you don't feel right. You suspect that you have adrenal fatigue.

You can take solace in the fact that thousands of people are experiencing similar symptoms and have complaints similar to yours. This book helps you understand what adrenal fatigue is, examines its causes, and explores how to evaluate and treat this condition.

### *Focusing on Adrenal Gland Function*

The adrenal glands are two organs of the body that people don't often think about. Yet they're vital to your health and well-being because they do so much. To fully understand how adrenal fatigue can affect your health, you first need to understand the many functions of the adrenal glands.

You can think of the adrenal glands as regulators of the human body, overseeing many processes. Your adrenal glands are important in regulating blood pressure and acid-base balance. They're also important in the production of many hormones, which are crucial in the evaluation and management of adrenal fatigue. Examples of the hormones that your adrenal glands secrete include

aldosterone, the sex hormones (namely, androstenedione, dehydroepiandrosterone [DHEA], and pregnenolone), and the all-important cortisol. We cover the fundamentals of adrenal gland structure and function in Chapter 2.

## *Figuring Out Adrenal Fatigue Factors, Stages, and Symptoms*

If you were to keep your car running 24/7 and never shut it off, your engine would simply burn out. If you never had your car tuned up, never changed your oil, and used lower octane gas, then your engine would be at a much higher risk of burning out faster. Similarly, *adrenal fatigue* occurs when the adrenal glands are constantly working and never have time to rest and recover. Stimulated by acidity, inflammation, and chronic illness, the adrenal glands secrete way more cortisol than they should.

*Cortisol* is a necessary hormone. In the setting of an acute injury or illness, this hormone is important in turning off the acute inflammatory process when it's no longer needed. However, in chronic illness and chronic inflammation, the adrenal glands continue to produce cortisol. Over time, the adrenal glands become so fatigued that they aren't able to produce enough of the hormones that the body needs to function on a daily basis, such as cortisol and aldosterone.

A number of factors may lead to adrenal fatigue: heredity, stressors early in life, medication effects, and environmental and psychological factors. In Chapter 3, you read more about these factors, the stages of adrenal fatigue, and the differences between adrenal fatigue and other adrenal-related syndromes, including Cushing's syndrome and Addison's disease.

The best patients are those who are attuned to their bodies. Often, a patient with adrenal fatigue can have one or many symptoms, including constant fatigue that doesn't get better, even with a good night's sleep. You may notice increasing dizziness or lightheadedness if you stand up too quickly. You may notice that your blood pressure is lower than usual. You may find yourself craving salt more. In Chapter 4, you read about many of the typical and atypical symptoms that someone with adrenal fatigue can experience.

## *Being Tested for Adrenal Fatigue*

Proper testing for adrenal fatigue is important to see whether you need supplementation with the hormones you read about in Chapter 2, including cortisol, aldosterone, and sex hormones like DHEA.

But the testing of adrenal gland function involves much more than simply measuring the levels of hormones in your blood. Salivary testing is much more accurate than blood testing. In addition, your healthcare provider should look for causes of adrenal fatigue by measuring toxin levels, searching for food sensitivities, and looking for potential causes of inflammation. See Chapter 5 for more information on being tested for adrenal fatigue.

## *Digging Deeper into Potential Triggers*

After you recognize the symptoms of adrenal fatigue, you want to determine its causes. Major causes include chronic stress, lack of sleep, chronic inflammation, acidity, poor nutrition, and impaired intestinal health. You can't begin to treat adrenal fatigue without treating these underlying conditions. This section gives you a brief overview of these specific trigger factors; in Part II, you read about them in depth.



Adrenal fatigue is often a result of multiple causes that occur simultaneously. For example, someone with a chronic illness likely suffers from increased inflammation, has poor nutrition, lacks quality sleep, and has an unhealthy intestinal tract.

### *Stressing out and sleeping poorly*

In Chapter 6, you read about the many kinds of stress people in modern times have to deal with (the adrenal glands have to deal with these multiple stresses as well). These include emotional stressors, physical stressors, and other stressors that you may not even be aware of, including electromagnetic stress.

Chapter 6 also discusses how people sleep poorly and how they can sleep better. Notice we didn't say sleep *longer*. Certainly, getting seven to eight hours of good quality sleep each night is important, but even if you get the requisite number of hours, you still may be sleeping badly. Sleeping *better* involves improving both sleep quantity and sleep quality.

### *Being inflamed and out of balance*

Inflammation often goes hand in hand with adrenal fatigue, so it's important to be aware of inflammation's potential triggers. Chapter 7 covers some of those triggers, including chronic illnesses such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, fibromyalgia syndrome, Lyme disease, thyroid dysfunction, and celiac disease.

Another potent trigger of adrenal fatigue is acidosis. The kidneys and adrenal glands can get extremely stressed out trying to deal with the daily acid load that people impose on them each day through the Western diet and conditions such as diabetes. See Chapter 7 for information on acidosis.

## *Handling nutrition issues*

Proper nutrition is vital to combating adrenal fatigue. The food choices you make can directly affect the health of your intestines, and the intestines are the root of all chronic illness and inflammation. If you have a healthy gut, then the amount of inflammation in your body is likely minimal. A diet high in sugar and processed foods, on the other hand, can increase the risk of yeast overgrowth in the intestine, inciting even more inflammation. Eating foods that you may be sensitive to or even allergic to can also have toxic and inflammatory effects on your body.

You should also be aware of the role nutrient deficiencies play in the perpetuation of total body inflammation and adrenal stress. You may eat three meals a day but still be severely malnourished. Deficiencies in minerals and vitamins can cause issues with your health.

Chapter 8 has the lowdown on the role that nutrition plays in adrenal fatigue.

## *Getting Treated*



Everyone is different, and not everyone manifests symptoms of adrenal fatigue the same way. So although the treatment of adrenal fatigue is complex and multifaceted, it is (and should be) personalized to fit your particular health concerns and health needs. In Part III, we get to the nitty-gritty of treating adrenal fatigue.

## *Finding a practitioner*

One of the most challenging aspects of diagnosing and treating adrenal fatigue is finding a good healthcare provider who has an understanding of this condition. Your current doctor or healthcare provider may not even be aware of the condition or give credence to its existence. In Chapter 9, you read about healthcare practitioners who have expertise not only in recognizing the condition but also in diagnosing and treating it. Examples include naturopathic physicians, holistic medical physicians, and other healthcare practitioners certified in anti-aging medicine.

Nutritionists are also invaluable because the first line of defense in improving your adrenal health is nutrition. Changing how you eat and choosing the right foods can make your adrenal glands stronger and allow you to feel better. It's no accident that a nutritionist, Wendy Jo Peterson, is a coauthor of this book. She's restored thousands of people to better health and a fuller life.

Chapter 9 explores a team approach to your health and wellness care. Maintaining communication and holding yourself accountable for changes you need to make are key to your success.

## *Making the most of medications and hormone supplements*

After you identify one or more healthcare providers to work with, you can begin to talk about the treatment of adrenal fatigue. Chapter 10 reviews some of the medications that your practitioner may prescribe to help raise your blood pressure and keep it in an acceptable range.

Chapter 10 also explores some of the hormones that your healthcare provider may prescribe to treat adrenal fatigue, including hydrocortisone and fludrocortisone. The results of testing (see Chapter 5) determine whether you need to be on supplements along with these hormones. We also discuss hormone replacement with bioidentical hormones such as estrogen, progesterone, and DHEA.



Because the treatment of adrenal fatigue is personalized, your treatment plan may not require bioidentical hormone replacement. The plan for treatment depends on the levels of your hormones.

## *Considering alternative treatments*

In your journey to overcome adrenal fatigue, supplementing your diet with extra nutrients can make all the difference, but you need to be careful. Treatment should not only support the adrenal glands but also address the underlying conditions that are causing the adrenal fatigue in the first place.

In Chapter 11, you read about ways to replace minerals and vitamins, increase cellular energy levels, reduce inflammation, provide antioxidant support, and normalize your body's pH and intestinal health. Chapter 11 also discusses getting better sleep with supplements, using herbs, and undergoing detoxification.

## *Eating and exercising well*

Two big ways that you can help your adrenal glands are committing to a regular exercise regimen and eating the right foods. In Chapter 12, we give you exercise pointers that can help you feel better, reduce stress, and improve your sleep, all of which reduce adrenal stress. An exercise regimen consists of aerobics (like walking and biking), resistance training (such as lifting weights), and meditative exercises (like yoga and t'ai chi).

This chapter also provides some basic nutrition guidelines to improve adrenal health and combat adrenal fatigue. You read about nutritious, high-quality food that not only boosts adrenal gland function but also tastes delicious.

## *Taking care of yourself at work*

Work-related stress is epidemic. Many people spend more time at work than with their families. In Chapter 13, you read about ways to reduce stress, incorporate exercise into your daily routine, and eat healthier in the workplace. We explain the importance of enjoying some time off from work and help you avoid brain fog in the workplace, where you need to be able to think clearly and function well.

## *Trying Great Recipes for Combatting Adrenal Fatigue*

In Part IV, the focus is on getting you in the kitchen for some great, tasty recipes to help combat adrenal fatigue. From energizing breakfasts in Chapter 14 to fuel-food lunches in Chapter 15 to delicious dinners in Chapter 16, you get some of coauthor Wendy Jo's mouthwatering recipes that not only satisfy the palate but also combat adrenal fatigue and help you flourish.

If you're going to sneak in a snack, why not make it healthy and delicious? In Chapter 17, Wendy Jo shares some ideas for snacks and desserts that both fortify and satisfy you.