



# Overcome Adrenal Fatigue: Regain Your Health & Energy

by Heather Dane

We all seem to need more energy these days. If you were to do an informal poll, asking your friends if they have all the energy they need, you might be surprised to find that the most common answer is “no.” And many of them might not be aware that a frequent - but often overlooked - cause of low energy is adrenal fatigue, also known as adrenal exhaustion. In fact, it has been estimated that up to 80 percent of Americans will suffer from a lack of energy due to adrenal fatigue at some point in their lives.<sup>[1]</sup>

However, there is some controversy regarding this condition. Many natural health practitioners recognize it as a syndrome that occurs when the adrenals are overworked and no longer produce sufficient quantities of hormones needed for vibrant energy and overall wellness. However, in allopathic medicine, it is not an accepted medical diagnosis. Before we look at the reasons that make adrenal fatigue so controversial, let’s examine what our adrenals do and why dysfunction in them is so common.

Your adrenals are two walnut-shaped glands that sit on top of your kidneys. They play key roles in a variety of physiological processes, including energy production, blood sugar

regulation, hormonal balance, and the stress response. If you are experiencing a lack of energy, ask yourself: How are your stress levels? Many people who feel short on energy are long on stress. In fact, stress - particularly, chronic stress - is a major cause of adrenal fatigue.

## Stress and Adrenal Fatigue

In their 2015 Stress in America survey, the American Psychological Association found that 24 percent of adults reported experiencing “extreme” stress levels, yet many rarely took the time to engage in stress management activities.<sup>[2]</sup> We seem to be caught in a modern conundrum: We have so much to do and so little time and energy with which to get it done. In the long run, one of the things that suffers most is our health.

By now, most of us know that stress is a contributing factor in many illnesses and diseases.<sup>[3]</sup> What some of us may not know is how this happens. In simplified terms, each time we experience stress, the hypothalamus, located at the base of the brain, signals the adrenals to come to our rescue. With a chronically stressful lifestyle, three adrenal hormones become mainstays in the body: adrenaline (or epinephrine), norepinephrine (or noradrenaline), and cortisol.

When adrenaline floods your body during stress, the effect is like slamming your foot on the gas pedal when driving up a big hill. Increasing your heart rate, raising blood pressure, and boosting energy supplies, adrenaline provides your body with the resources it needs to get up and go. Norepinephrine evokes a similar response, making sure the body’s resources are



focused on flight. The subsequent release of cortisol, the primary stress hormone, can be equated to what happens once the engine's power kicks in and you're speeding up the hill. Elevating blood glucose levels, boosting the availability of substances needed for tissue repair, and curbing nonessential body functions, cortisol allows you to keep going.<sup>[4]</sup>

We know that driving up a steep hill with the pedal to the metal is not great for a car, but we often do the equivalent to our bodies. Over time, chronic stress diverts the body's attention from the maintenance of wellness - impacting digestion, growth processes, immunity, reproduction, mood, memory, and detoxification - because the priority becomes dealing with the perceived emergency. Moreover, when the adrenals bail us out of stressful situations too often, they become overworked and fail to produce hormones, such as cortisol, in the amounts needed for our ongoing well-being.

## Adrenal Insufficiency

While the allopathic medical community often fails to recognize adrenal fatigue's existence, adrenal insufficiency, a more extreme condition, is an accepted diagnosis. Primary adrenal insufficiency, or Addison's disease, is a rare hormonal disorder in which the adrenals are damaged and unable to produce sufficient cortisol (and sometimes another hormone, aldosterone). Secondary adrenal insufficiency, which is more common, occurs when the pituitary does not produce enough adrenocorticotropin (ACTH), a hormone that stimulates the adrenal glands to produce cortisol; if ACTH output is too low, cortisol production drops.<sup>[5]</sup>

Adrenal insufficiency can be life threatening

because its symptoms tend to begin gradually and are frequently unrecognized in early stages. Some of its most common symptoms are chronic, worsening fatigue; loss of appetite; weight loss; generalized weakness; and hypotension.<sup>[6]</sup> As we shall see, adrenal fatigue shares many of these symptoms, although it is a milder dysfunction. It is sometimes considered a subclinical form of adrenal insufficiency. There are various stages along the spectrum of adrenal dysfunction, which - while usually not as serious as Addison's disease - still impact quality of life.

## Symptoms of Adrenal Fatigue

One of the reasons there is a debate about whether adrenal fatigue is a "real illness" is because of its wide-ranging signs and symptoms. Some of the most common include:

- » Fatigue, especially in the early morning and mid-afternoon
- » Unrefreshing sleep or difficulty getting out of bed in the morning, even after a full eight hours
- » The feeling that everyday tasks take too much effort
- » A sense of being overwhelmed, even by small things
- » Increased energy and alertness in the evening
- » Difficulty bouncing back from stress or illness
- » Cravings for salty or sweet foods
- » Reliance on caffeine or stimulants for energy



Many additional signs and symptoms may also occur, depending on how advanced the condition is. Examples of these are:

- » Anxiety or depression
- » Brain fog (forgetfulness or lack of mental clarity)
- » Blood sugar swings
- » Cold hands and feet
- » Digestive problems (such as gas, bloating, and nausea)
- » Extreme tiredness after exercise
- » Hair loss
- » Hormone imbalances or increased premenstrual or perimenopausal symptoms
- » Lightheadedness or blood pressure changes when getting up rapidly from sitting or lying down
- » Low libido
- » Mood swings
- » Skin problems
- » Sleep disorders (difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep)
- » Weight gain or loss

As you can see, the range of possible symptoms is very broad, and it's important to know that there may be reasons other than adrenal fatigue for many of these. If you regularly experience a number of these symptoms, it's best to work with your health practitioner to rule out other potential causes.

## Diagnostic Tests

Another reason that adrenal fatigue is so controversial is that the ACTH challenge test - the standard blood test that many conventional physicians use to check for adrenal dysfunction - will not detect it. In this test, a baseline of circulating cortisol is established and then ACTH is injected and the response to this stressor is measured. However, test results only indicate extreme underproduction or overproduction of hormones, and adrenal fatigue - even at levels that seriously impact health and lifestyle - falls within the range of normalcy.<sup>[7]</sup>

Fortunately, there are other tests that can help you identify adrenal fatigue.<sup>[1](pp92-94),[8]</sup> The ones I recommend to my clients are the saliva hormone test and the DUTCH (dried urine) test. Your doctor can identify which test is best for you.

**Blood Tests** - A blood/serum cortisol test provides a measure of total cortisol. It does not show the hormone metabolites, diurnal fluctuations of cortisol (which cycles over a 24-hour period), level of free cortisol (the biologically active form), or hormone levels within tissues. Some practitioners use blood tests in combination with urine testing to get more complete results.

**Saliva Hormone Test** - This is a measure of free cortisol levels within cells, and it can be more accurate than blood and urine tests.<sup>[1]</sup>  
(p83),[9] The saliva test that is performed four times in one day is the most helpful because you can see how your cortisol fluctuates throughout the day.

**24-Hour Urine Cortisol Test** - This test measures free cortisol in the urine. The downside of 24-hour urine testing is that all of the urine collected goes into one container, and there's no indication of how your cortisol level changes over time.

**DUTCH (Dried Urine Test for Comprehensive Hormones)** - This is one of the newer tests where urine is collected on test strips and dried. This collection method allows you to see changes in cortisol patterns from morning to night. This test gives you the advantages of the saliva hormone test and the 24-hour urine cortisol test in one. Results show free cortisol, other hormones, and hormone metabolites.

## Stressful Lifestyles

Once stress becomes chronic and your adrenals are fatigued, you may find that provoking the rush of adrenaline can help you get through the day. Adrenaline can feel a bit like a shot of caffeine, giving you the jolt

you need to make things happen. Over time, the adrenaline rush can be addictive, and you may - without even realizing it - encourage it through your lifestyle choices.

These days, data from everywhere - from the World Health Organization to the Human Genome Project - is pointing to the fact that most health conditions are less about genetics and more about our lifestyle. As a health coach and nutritionist, I find that when a client comes to me with symptoms of adrenal fatigue, we can often find the root cause in their mindset and lifestyle habits. This is great news because it means we can begin to make lasting changes.

Sometimes, a health issue, such as an injury, infection, autoimmune condition, or other chronic illness, is contributing to adrenal fatigue symptoms. If this is the case for you, your health practitioner can help you identify a plan for addressing both your health issue and your adrenal function. However, you may still find it helpful to assess your lifestyle habits.

Here are some examples of lifestyle contributors to adrenal fatigue:

- » Regularly overbooking your schedule
- » Seeking approval from others instead of following your own inner guidance
- » Engaging in chronic negative thinking (automatically thinking the worst about a situation or about yourself)
- » Feeling helpless, powerless, or out of control
- » Not participating in fun activities
- » Neglecting rest or self-care routines that help you replenish yourself (e.g.,

meditation, quiet time, and time to be alone, doing things that restore your energy)

- » Multitasking
- » Going to bed too late or not getting enough sleep
- » Overexercising
- » Practicing perfectionism
- » Maintaining poor eating habits (e.g., skipping meals or eating a diet of sugary foods or fast and processed foods)
- » Pushing yourself too hard
- » Working long hours, especially without breaks
- » Working the night shift, which can interrupt normal circadian rhythms
- » Relying on stimulants, such as caffeine or nicotine, to gain energy

I have a confession to make: I used to be an adrenaline junkie. It was so bad that when I started to change my lifestyle from working 12-hour days to leaving work early to go to yoga, I'd change into my yoga clothes at red lights on the way to class! That's a good example of an adrenaline lifestyle, where you are so busy that you don't feel you can take even a few minutes of time for yourself. Often, you may feel you have to multitask just to get through the day.

Interestingly, the more I slowed down, the better I felt and the better my brain worked. The year I slowed down, I also worked smarter and encouraged my whole team to do the same. At the end of the year, I got a big raise and promotion, and my team was the highest performing in our division.

I learned that slowing down is the key to better health and performance.

One thing I did not expect, however, was that when I first removed the caffeine and excess adrenaline from my life, I'd feel so tired. This fatigue often causes people to go back to their old ways and, let me tell you, I was tempted. However, if you can stay the course, it's worth it. Plus, there are some easy nutritional and lifestyle changes you can make to give you real, lasting energy.

## Practical Solutions for Resolving Adrenal Fatigue

The name of the game when recovering from adrenal fatigue is first deciding you are worth it. You are! Often, a health condition that causes uncomfortable symptoms is an opportunity for you to begin listening to your body. Your body is where your intuition speaks to you, and symptoms are the language it uses. These days, science is finding more and more evidence that the body and brain are linked. The gut-brain connection, in particular, has become a source of study for many scientists, who have found that the gut and brain have 24/7, two-way communication.<sup>[10]</sup> This gives a whole new meaning to having a "gut feeling."

You could see adrenal fatigue as an opportunity to recommit to your health and well-being. It could be an opportunity to find out what's really important to you, to learn to take more time for yourself, and to trust that as you take care of yourself, everything and everyone else will take care of themselves. Most people with adrenal fatigue feel like they are carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders. They feel responsible for everyone and everything

around them. Mothers often find themselves in this position, working as well as caring for the family, which sometimes includes elderly relatives.

Healing from adrenal fatigue often means changing your lifestyle in a way that supports your well-being. You may choose to take more time for yourself and delegate some tasks to other people. When you trust that this is in everyone's best interest, it's a lot easier to start creating the space for healing. Here are some lifestyle tips to help you resolve adrenal fatigue:

### **DECIDE YOU ARE WORTH IT**

It's all right to put yourself first and everyone else second as a form of self-care.

### **PUT WHITE SPACE IN YOUR CALENDAR.**

This is free time that enables you to rest or take a break and allows for the unpredictable things that can happen.

### **ASK FOR HELP**

Find ways to share the load with others. You might have your kids or spouse pitch in, your friends support you, or your colleagues or associates take on some of your work tasks. At first, it may feel selfish or irresponsible to ask for help. However, you'll often find that everyone around you thinks you've been taking on too much anyway, and they are glad to help. There may be people who grumble and complain (such as teenagers), so be prepared to stick to your guns and remember the first tip above: You are worth it!

### **DO ONE THING AT A TIME**

Although you may feel you get more done when multitasking, it actually reduces

productivity while creating stress and adversely affecting brain health.<sup>[11,12]</sup> One of the first changes I recommend to my multitasking, busy clients is to do one thing at a time and pay attention to whatever they are doing. Maintaining focused awareness on a task, instead of thinking about the past or future, is a huge relief for the brain. Often, this improves relationships with family, friends, and colleagues because you are giving them your full attention. Interestingly, performance also increases, which often means you can get more done in a day.

### **NOURISH YOUR BODY WITH WHOLE FOODS**

Eating sugary and processed foods will sabotage your adrenal health efforts. Your adrenals require nutrients, such as minerals, B vitamins, and vitamin C.<sup>[13,14,15]</sup> These critical nutrients are often in short supply in processed and fast foods, and too much sugar actually depletes your body of them. See the section on nutritional remedies and elixirs, later in this article, for foods that can help boost adrenal health.

### **FOCUS ON HEALING YOUR GUT**

Many people with adrenal fatigue have underlying gut issues, which affects the body's ability to digest and assimilate nutrients. Foods such as bone broth and naturally fermented foods can help you heal your gut.

### **KEEP YOUR BLOOD SUGAR STABLE**

If you normally skip breakfast or other meals, or if you are always following low-calorie diets, your adrenals may be suffering. These behaviors can lead to low blood sugar, which is a body and brain emergency. Make sure to eat wholesome meals and snacks when



you are hungry. If you are not in touch with your natural hunger signal, you may find that over time, as you maintain a healthy eating pattern, it kicks back in.

### **DRINK PLENTY OF WATER WITH MINERALS ADDED**

Dehydration is a physical stressor, often because it is accompanied by electrolyte imbalance.<sup>[13]</sup> Drink plenty of water and add some sea salt, Himalayan salt, or a mineral supplement. Although it's sometimes recommended that people aim for eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day, listen to your body and do what feels right for you. Take your time and build up to the right amount of water for your body. I recommend my clients add to their water either Anderson's Concentrated Mineral Drops or ConcenTrace Trace Mineral Drops, both of which contain a wide range of natural sea minerals. Adding a few drops to each glass of water is a great place to start. My clients have reported more energy and better moods within the first week of adding minerals to their water. Make sure you don't drink too much water near mealtimes, as this can inhibit digestion.

### **EXERCISE GENTLY**

Listen to your body and do what feels appropriate for your energy level. If you are fatigued but have some energy for exercise, try rebounding (jumping on a mini-trampoline), swimming gently, or taking walks at your own pace. Stop when you feel tired. If you listen to your body and learn to trust it, it will tell you when you're ready for more.

### **GET PLENTY OF SLEEP**

In traditional Chinese medicine, it is believed that going to bed around 10:00 pm allows for the greatest healing of the organs related to energy. Try it for yourself and see how you feel. If you are a night owl, you may want to reduce your bedtime by about 30 minutes to one hour every few nights until you are able to go to bed at 10:00 pm. Aim for at least seven to eight hours of sleep. One tip I give clients who have trouble getting to sleep is to do a wind-down routine, starting at about 7:00 or 8:00 pm. Lower the lights; turn off the TV, computer, or phone; play soft music; read; take a bath; or meditate to help your body get into rest mode.

### **SAY NO**

Learning how to say no to others and to excess obligations allows you to say yes to yourself and your healing process. Healing is a time to come back to yourself, to nurture yourself, and to reassess your priorities. This is hard to do when you are buried in obligations or to-do lists. It's okay to take time out from doing things for others while you recalibrate. Often, once you heal, you will have a new set of priorities for living a balanced life and newfound energy to support yourself and others.

## Nutritional Remedies & Elixirs for Adrenal Health

You can use food as medicine to help your adrenals heal. This can be a fun, delicious way to nurture your body back to good health. When you feed your body nourishing foods, you feel more satisfied and balanced. Additionally, this strategy helps your gut stay healthy, which sets the stage for balanced moods and brain health.

### FOODS TO AVOID

- » Sugar, high fructose corn syrup, and artificial sweeteners
- » Grain flours
- » Gluten
- » Genetically modified foods
- » MSG and other excitotoxins, which may be found in natural flavors, white vinegar, citric acid, carrageenan, and hydrolyzed protein
- » Processed and fast foods
- » Conventional meats
- » Trans fats and refined fats and oils (e.g., margarine, canola oil, and any oil that says “refined” on the label)



### FOODS TO EMPHASIZE (PREFERABLY ORGANIC)

- » Seaweed - for its rich mineral content; bladderwrack is a medicinal seaweed that is great for the thyroid and adrenals
- » Leafy greens (e.g., lettuces, Swiss chard, kale, collards, and cabbage)
- » Vegetables in a rainbow of colors - for variety and antioxidants
- » Bone broth - for collagen to help heal leaky gut, and vitamins, fatty acids, and minerals to nourish the adrenals
- » Vegetable broth - for easily assimilable nutrients
- » Fruits with low sugar content (e.g., Granny Smith apples and berries)
- » Pasture-fed meats and poultry
- » Organ meats - full of B vitamins and minerals
- » Cold-water fatty fish (e.g., salmon, herring, and sardines)
- » Healthy plant fats - unrefined oils (e.g., extra-virgin olive oil and virgin coconut oil), nuts, seeds, and avocados
- » Healthy animal fats from pasture-fed animals (e.g., raw butter, ghee, beef tallow, chicken and duck fat, and lard) - to boost absorption of minerals and fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K2), which are critical for recovery from adrenal fatigue
- » Fermented foods and drinks (e.g., sauerkraut, kefir, and kombucha) – for probiotics to help heal the gut

## Supplements for Energy and Adrenal Health

These are some of the supplements with which I've had great success in resolving adrenal fatigue with my clients. The goal with these supplements is to gently boost energy while supporting the adrenals and overall physical well-being. It's best to consult with your healthcare practitioner to find out which of these are recommended for you.

### MINERALS

Minerals are critical for adrenal health. Worldwide, over two billion people are estimated to be deficient in key minerals, particularly iodine, iron, and zinc.<sup>[16]</sup> Around 80 percent of people are deficient in magnesium.<sup>[17]</sup> Restoring magnesium sets the stage for improved energy and mineral balance. Consider taking magnesium glycinate, magnesium taurate, magnesium malate, or magnesium L-threonate. Often, it helps to experiment to find the right form of magnesium for you. Adding ¼ teaspoon of sea salt or Himalayan salt to an 8-ounce glass of water is a very affordable way to add trace minerals.

### B-COMPLEX VITAMINS

B vitamins help with cellular metabolism, balanced moods, and energy. They also help with a process called methylation, which supports energy production, digestion, sleep, hormone balance, and detoxification. Look for a B-complex with pantethine (a B5 derivative) and active forms of B12 (as methylcobalamin or adenosylcobalamin), folate (as 5-MTHF), and B6 (as P5P).

### WHOLE-FOOD VITAMIN C

Avoid isolated ascorbic acid, which is only part of the vitamin C complex as it exists in food; it can cause a paradoxical vitamin C deficiency and lead to thyroid hormone production failure.<sup>[18]</sup> Thyroid function and

adrenal function often go hand in hand. Additionally, tyrosinase, a component of whole-food vitamin C, is important for mineral balance.<sup>[19]</sup> Innate Response and MegaFood are good brands for whole-food vitamin C.

### ADRENAL CORTEX

Some people do very well with glandulars, such as adrenal cortex, which supports the health of the adrenals. Make sure to choose a brand, such as Nutricology, that uses glandulars from grassfed animals.

### ADAPTOGENS

These herbs help regulate the body's response to stress, while providing gentle energy. Examples are ashwagandha, astragalus, holy basil, licorice root, rhodiola, schisandra, and Siberian ginseng. I recommend my clients take tinctures in water or make teas with these herbs to sip during the day. You can also take a supplement that contains multiple adaptogens, such as Innate Response's Adrenal Response Complete Care.

### PQQ

Pyrroloquinoline quinone is a micronutrient with antioxidant and anti-aging properties that helps produce energy at the mitochondrial level. It also helps the mitochondria - the energy centers within your cells - reproduce, regenerate, and repair themselves.

## COQ10

Coenzyme Q10 is another micronutrient that protects the mitochondria from oxidative damage and supports energy production. Both CoQ10 and PQQ tend to be very helpful in resolving adrenal fatigue.

## D-RIBOSE

This natural sugar is necessary for building adenosine triphosphate (ATP), the compound that stores and delivers energy in your cells.

## ACETYL L-CARNITINE

This amino acid helps with moods and moves fatty acids into the mitochondria for conversion into ATP.



# Recipes for Adrenal Health



## ADRENAL ELIXIR

Take this drink every day at 10:00 am and 3:00 pm to boost your adrenal health and provide you with a source of minerals and vitamin C.

To 8 ounces of water, add ¼ teaspoon of Himalayan salt or unrefined sea salt (do not use table salt).

Add 2 to 4 ounces of fresh-squeezed lemon juice.

Mix in one of the following: 1 ounce of organic un sulphured blackstrap molasses (such as Plantation) or 1 tablespoon of organic tart cherry juice concentrate. Each of these adds potassium and other minerals.



## BONE BROTH BURDOCK ROOT ELIXIR

This recipe combines the anti-inflammatory, immune-boosting, and energizing characteristics of bone broth with the benefits of burdock root. In Chinese medicine, burdock root is used as a blood builder and blood sugar balancer, as well as for endocrine support. It aids the liver and gallbladder in processing and distributing lipids necessary for adrenal function.[20]

Simmer 1 teaspoon of fresh or dried burdock root and 1 cup of bone broth (any type of bone broth works) in a saucepan for 15 minutes. Be careful not to boil it. You can add some thinly sliced ginger for added digestive benefits, if you like.

Strain out the burdock and enjoy your drink!

Reserve the burdock for cooking.

It may take some time in the kitchen to make foods that will nourish your adrenals, but remember, taking time for yourself is the first step in healing adrenal fatigue.

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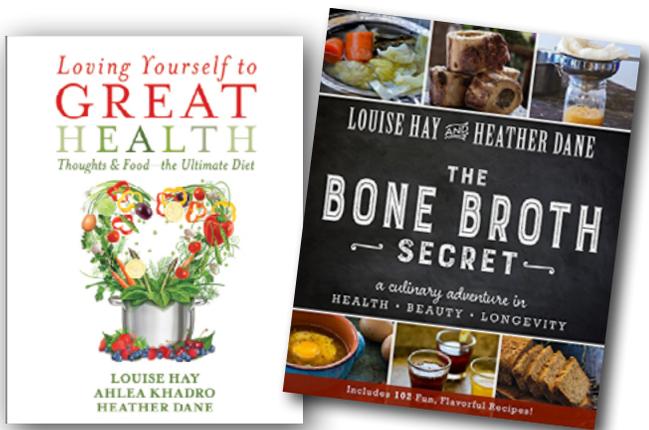
# About Heather Dane

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