



PATIENT RESOURCES

Adrenal Fatigue

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The term “adrenal fatigue” has been used to explain a group of symptoms that are said to occur in people who are under long-term mental, emotional, or physical stress.

No scientific proof exists to support adrenal fatigue as a true medical condition. Doctors are concerned that if you are told you have this condition, the real cause of your symptoms may not be found and treated correctly. Also, the reported

treatment for adrenal fatigue is not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (the government agency that oversees most food and medical products) and may be expensive since insurance companies are unlikely to cover the costs.

Endocrine Connection

Supporters of adrenal fatigue believe the problem begins when many different life stresses become too much for the body to handle. Our adrenal glands—small organs located above the kidneys—usually deal with stress by producing hormones like **cortisol**. According to the theory of adrenal fatigue, when people are faced with long-term stress, their adrenal glands cannot keep up with the body's need for these hormones. It is when this happens that supporters of adrenal fatigue believe that symptoms may appear.

► Diagnosis and Prevention

There is no test that can detect adrenal fatigue. Many times, a person will be told he or she has adrenal fatigue based on symptoms alone.

Sometimes, a blood or saliva test may be offered, but tests for adrenal fatigue are not based on scientific facts or supported by good scientific studies, so the results and analysis of these tests may not be correct.

► Symptoms and Risk Factors

Symptoms said to be due to adrenal fatigue include tiredness, trouble fall. asleep at night or waking up in the morning, salt and sugar craving, and

needing stimulants like caffeine to get through the day. These symptoms are common and non-specific, meaning they can be found in many diseases. They also can occur as part of a normal, busy life.

Doctors urge you not to waste precious time accepting an unproven diagnosis such as adrenal fatigue if you feel tired, weak, or depressed. If you have these symptoms, you may have adrenal insufficiency, depression, obstructive sleep apnea, or other health problems. Getting a real diagnosis is very important to help you feel better and overcome your health problem.

► **Dispelling the Myth**

Supporters of adrenal fatigue may advise you to improve your lifestyle by giving up smoking, alcohol, and drugs. Starting an exercise program, eating healthy foods, and following a daily routine for sleeping and waking will almost always make you feel better, no matter what the medical diagnosis.

You may also be told to buy special supplements or vitamins. These supplements claim to be made just for adrenal health. While regular vitamins and minerals may be good for your health, doctors are concerned that supplements or vitamins sold as a treatment for adrenal fatigue could hurt you. Many of these supplements have not been tested for safety.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (the government agency that oversees most food and medical products) does not oversee nutritional supplements and vitamins. This means there is no guarantee that what's on the label of a supplement is really what's inside the bottle. In some cases, supplements have very few, if any, active ingredients. In other cases, the

dose of a particular ingredient may be too high. This is true whether you purchase supplements from your local drug store, a specialty pharmacy (sometimes called a compounding pharmacy) where supplements are made directly by the pharmacist, or online.

If you take adrenal hormone supplements when you don't need them, your adrenal glands may stop working and become unable to make the hormones you need when you are under physical stress. When these supplements are stopped, a person's adrenal glands can remain "asleep" for months. People with this problem may be in danger of developing a life-threatening condition called adrenal crisis.

EDITOR(S): Irina Bancos, M.D., Melanie Schorr Haines, M.D., Jason Wexler, M.D.

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