

# 12 Steps to Break Free From Stress

Not everyone has heard about the adrenal glands, but everyone has heard about adrenaline. This famous fight-or-flight hormone (also called epinephrine) gives your body and muscles a boost when you really need it. Blood is diverted away from the skin and digestive tract and shunted to the muscles and brain.

The adrenal glands produce not only adrenaline but also cortisol. Cortisol is produced to help the body respond to stress. Small increases in cortisol will usually give you a burst of energy, improve memory and immunity, and even lower your sensitivity to pain. The stress response may have produced adrenaline to get you going, but your body needs cortisol to help respond to stress in a healthy manner.

So what makes the adrenals—and the cortisol hormone in particular—so important? The adrenals are vital because the ongoing long-term effect of the adrenal glands pumping out excessive cortisol repeatedly during the day for minor stresses may eventually destroy our bodies. That is the adrenaline trail, and it is leading millions of people off a health-ruining cliff.

## **Causes of Adrenal Fatigue**

You will never balance—much less optimize—your other hormones until you balance your adrenal hormones. Quite simply, your hormone health requires healthy adrenals. That is because impaired adrenal function can make your hormone issues worse and delay any forward progress you might be making. Sometimes the adrenals are the root of the problem, but usually they act more like gas or accelerant to an already-burning fire. They usually make things worse, and putting a fire out with gas is

not a good strategy.

Because hormones always operate in a loop, the lower your hormones go, usually the more cortisol you make, and the more cortisol your body pumps out, the more it messes up your other hormones.

This vicious cycle never ends, but your adrenals cannot keep it up forever. The overproduction of cortisol eventually wears your adrenal glands down, resulting in adrenal fatigue and even complete adrenal burnout. Cortisol levels usually plummet, which increases your risk for inflammatory and autoimmune diseases and essentially invites them into your body.

Most doctors don't even test the adrenals, which can explain why so many adrenal issues are missed. When the plan is to address an issue only when it's bad enough, then an adrenal test is of little value. When the plan is to fix/prevent rather than patch/cover, getting your adrenals checked just might shed some light on your symptoms and possible hormone issues.

You may be thinking, "I don't have daily scary situations that get my adrenaline pumping, so why would my adrenals even have an issue?"

Scary adrenaline-pumping moments are rare and far between, and thankfully so. However, your body is under other pressures, stressors and worries that never give your stress-response system a break.

Cortisol is naturally produced to calm things down in short-term, high-alert situations. When there is no end to the loop or the stress, the cortisol keeps flowing. It's like your alarm button is stuck in the "on" position, and cortisol levels get higher and higher.

High cortisol can disrupt important bodily functions and lead

to problems such as high blood sugar, high blood pressure, decreased thyroid function and adrenal fatigue.

All of us experience stress. There's no way to avoid it entirely. So what do we do? I have found that most people dealing with adrenal issues from stress fall into one of the following categories:

**Type 1:** Super-busy people. These type-A go-getters work hard, have crazy hours, juggle everything, stay very busy and live with far too many things on their plates.

**Type 2:** Good people dealing with bad situations. The average person is under constant daily stress from finances, the job, marriage, children, traffic and relationships. The stress burden becomes unbearable when you add major life events like the death of a loved one, divorce, marital separation, moving, serious illness, domestic abuse or job loss.

**Type 3:** Sick people. These are people with chronic illness or pain, inflammation, panic attacks, anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue, chronic Lyme disease, mold illness, insomnia or PTSD. They are burnt out, frazzled, sick and hurting and can't sleep.

Which are you? Do any of these descriptions fit you, your personality or your situation? You and your doctor will need to confirm this, but from the many patients who have come through my door over the past 35 years, I would say that if you are type 1 or type 2, you most likely have adrenal fatigue. If you are type 3 and battle anything chronic, then your adrenals are most likely burnt out and maybe even flat-lined.

Generally speaking, we all fit into one of these three types, and that means we are all tiring our adrenals out. We need to recharge and reboot our adrenals, or we will have a host of symptoms and diseases to deal with later down the road. I have even seen teenagers suffering from adrenal burnout. That is no

way to head into the future. And that is why my experience practicing medicine tells me this cortisol loop applies to us all.

## **12 Steps to Adrenal Health**

When you exercise a muscle, and it is sore the next day, you rest it for a few days, and that is usually sufficient. Very simple. The same process of resting is needed for your adrenal glands, but that cannot happen if you are in the never-ending loop of cortisol production. The answer is to address the root issues that cause adrenal fatigue. Then your body can shake off the symptoms.

For me, I was the super-busy, type-A person. I worked crazy long hours, tried to meet the needs of 40 to 50 patients every day, managed a growing practice, wrote books, spoke in churches and on TV and radio in my “off” time, and exercised every weekday. Basically, I burned the candle at both ends.

I was far too busy. All this combined to tire out my adrenals, and I developed symptoms accordingly. How did I fix the real problem? I had to learn how to:

- Say no more than I said yes.
- Not get in a hurry.
- Slow down.
- Get into God’s rhythm and stay there.
- Breathe, relax and go with the flow.
- Not push and strive.
- Not fight the riptide of life.

I also stopped working on Saturdays, stopped taking calls in the middle of the night and saw fewer patients. Because my adrenals and cortisol levels were almost flatlined, pushing my adrenals way too far and dealing with chronic illness, it took me six to nine months to reboot my adrenal glands.

Patients with adrenal issues will find relief and healing when

they have a mindset that promotes adrenal health. Here are 12 secrets to a healthy adrenal mindset:

1. Reframe stresses. When something stressful takes place, reframing the incident can help considerably.
2. Forgive. A single moment of unforgiveness, whatever the cause, can hold people captive.
3. Deal honestly with issues. Even half-stresses are perceived stresses.
4. Apply EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing). Specialists in EMDR can help heal the impact of traumas that keep your stress response stuck.
5. Learn to manage and budget. When problems are managed, be they financial, relational or other, they are not as bad. Especially manage your finances and avoid going into debt.
6. Get counseling. A listening ear, with good practical advice, is a great help.
7. Change thinking through cognitive behavioral therapy. A professional counselor can help you correct flawed thinking that brings pain and stress. For example, when someone believes others are against him, everything will be seen through that light.
8. Let go. Anger, resentment and disappointment need to be released for good.
9. Laugh at life. Life happens, so you might as well laugh along the way. I commonly prescribe 10 belly laughs a day!
10. Live in peace. Keep your heart, mind and body at peace, and spend at least 15 minutes first thing in the morning reading your Bible.
11. Give yourself room. Practice having extra margins or breathing room in all areas of your life. Give yourself enough time and space to get things done.
12. Filter thoughts and actions through God's Word. Philippians 4:8 commands us to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report.

Refuse to think on anything contrary to that, and run every thought through that filter. If the thought is not pure, then don't think on it, and let it go.

You have probably seen the famous Serenity Prayer by American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. When I was younger, I thought it was something older people might say. The truth is, it's 100 percent applicable to all of us: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference."

The enemy of your adrenals is excessive, unrelenting stress, which comes in countless forms. Your job is to find what gives you the upper hand and then learn to live that way.

The more you learn to get in God's rhythm and slow down to rest, the more your body can heal. Even Jesus didn't get in a hurry. When Lazarus was dying, Jesus did not rush there, and because He didn't hurry, we saw His resurrection power. Make it a habit to live in a place of peace and get in His rhythm.

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