

Is the Heavy Load of Stress Causing You to Gain Weight?

If you've listened to any late night infomercials the last few years, you would think cortisol is as bad for us as the plagues Moses threw down on Pharaoh. Unfortunately, not everything said on infomercials is always true.

Infomercials would have us to believe that stress and cortisol are the reasons we all struggle with fatigue, weight gain, cravings, PMS, hot flashes and so on.

I don't think the good Lord designed a bad hormone, which most infomercials want us to believe. Cortisol is not a good or bad hormone; it simply does what it is designed to do.

If you're under stress, your adrenal glands will produce more cortisol and adrenaline, your stress hormones. The problem is that many of us are under constant, prolonged stress. This causes our adrenal glands to continually produce additional cortisol and adrenaline. The longer we stay in this constant state of stress and keep on pushing our adrenal glands to make more and more cortisol and adrenaline, the more we will eventually reach a point where our adrenals can't produce enough cortisol and adrenaline. When this happens, we call it adrenal exhaustion or adrenal fatigue, and that is when a whole host of other health problems creep in.

Our bodies are designed to handle stress. When we see that saber tooth tiger, we are supposed to run or get ready for the fight of our lives. It's called the "fight or flight" mode. Unfortunately, our bodies are not designed to be in that "fight or flight" mode 24/7. We are supposed to get away from that stressful situation and move into what is called the "resting and digesting" mode. This is when the body recovers and strengthens.

The Weight Loss-Fatigue Connection

The reason cortisol has caught so much attention is because our hormones have tremendous control on how our bodies burn calories for energy. Our bodies are designed to burn calories from fats for energy instead of carbohydrates and lean muscle tissue (protein).

In fact, we get more than 2 1/2 times more energy when we burn calories from stored body fats instead of carbs and proteins. This is why it is so much more than simple diet and exercise when it comes to losing weight. You can burn 300 calories on a treadmill, but did you burn calories from stored body fats or from carbs and protein?

Our hormones regulate whether our bodies burn calories from carbs, proteins or fats. This is why stress and cortisol has become such a big issue on weight loss and fatigue. Cortisol and adrenaline trigger your body to burn calories from carbs and lean muscle (protein) instead of fats. It literally inhibits your body from burning calories from stored body fat and takes you out of your fat-burning mode that you are designed to be in throughout the day.

So how can you tell if you're burning calories from fats instead of carbs and protein? Simple. Do you struggle with cravings and low blood sugar? Mid morning or afternoon slumps? Are you irritable if your meals are missed or delayed? Do you wake up and have a hard time falling back asleep? Do you have a hard time concentrating and staying focused? Do you have to eat every two or three hours to keep from getting light headed?

These are some simple questions that tell us how your body is functioning and if you're staying in your fat-burning zone. When everything is functioning the way the good Lord designed your body to function, you won't have all these little symptoms pestering you. In *To Burn or Not to Burn, Fat Is the*

Question (Brown Books), we talk all about how stress, diet and exercise trigger your hormones to burn or store fat.

The Domino Effect of Stress

All the stress and all that cortisol and adrenaline you trigger your adrenals to produce will interfere with how your thyroid functions. This can lead to fatigue, weight gain and depression. It will interfere with how your liver functions and lead to allergies, joint pain and headaches. It can disturb your digestive system and lead to bloating, indigestion and other irritable bowel problems. It will interfere with the balance of your estrogen, progesterone and testosterone and can lead to PMS, hot flashes and reduced libido. It will decrease your immune capability, affect your blood sugar and increase your risk of osteoporosis. The continued over-taxing of those adrenals is typically the first domino that falls.

The over- or under-production of both cortisol and adrenaline can negatively affect your health—not just your weight and energy levels. Infomercials would like us to believe that we all make too much cortisol and need to lower it, but that's not true! I find that with more than half of the patients I work with, I find out that their cortisol and adrenaline production is too low, not too high. Therefore, taking a supplement that is designed to lower cortisol may be leading you down the wrong road.

Secondly, if you suspect stress is part of your fatigue and weight gain problem, the last thing you want to be taking are any types of stimulants such as ma huang, ephedra, caffeine, guarana, kola or bitter orange, a newer herb to hit the market and a cousin to ephedra. The reason you want to stay away from stimulants is because they have a further depleting effect on your adrenal glands.

Many of the so-called cortisol lowering products that are

being marketed are loaded with stimulants, which only further deplete your adrenals and will only keep you in that vicious cycle of fatigue, weight gain and cravings. Sure you will get a boost of energy, but that energy is a result of a stimulant, not because your body is functioning the way the good Lord designed it to function.

Balancing Those Exhausted Adrenals

Overcoming the negative effects of stress on the body begins by nourishing and resting those depleted and exhausted adrenal glands. You do this by feeding your body the specific nutrients that are known to support the adrenal glands such as vitamin C and B, zinc, selenium, as well as various herbs including rhodiola, ashwagandha, cordyceps and ginseng. These herbs are classified as adaptogens, meaning they balance and stabilize various hormones.

As far as resting your adrenal glands, this is done by lowering the stress in your life. Is it mental or emotional stress? How much of it is physical and chemical stress? Are you not getting enough sleep? Are you missing meals? Are you eating foods that throw your blood sugar all over the place?

There are many different types of stress that can be affecting your health, so it's important to identify where that stress is coming from. Balancing and supporting those exhausted adrenal glands is more than swallowing a handful of vitamins. It's just as important to stop doing the things that have a negative impact on your health.

If you suspect stress is contributing to your fatigue, weight gain, or cravings, I invite you to take our online stress test and check to see if you are in your fat-burning zone at . {eoa}

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Dr. Len Lopez is a nutrition and fitness expert and creator of the *Work Horse Fitness Trainer*. His background in natural medicine and strength training gives him that special insight to help those who are struggling to bring both health and fitness together. You can learn more or get a second opinion at .

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