

Newsletter

September 2014

Too Tired to Exercise Stress, overtraining can lead to adrenal fatigue

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Impact Magazine May/June 2010

Have you ever found yourself skipping out on a regular workout routine because you're just too tired? Find that eight hours of sleep doesn't seem to be enough anymore? Perhaps you also find you crave coffee, soft drinks, salty or sweet snacks to keep you going later in the afternoon. If these are all common to you, you're certainly not alone. It seems fatigue and lethargy as a result of life's stresses are becoming some of the most common complaints amongst adults. And to combat fatigue, we are turning to the quick energy boosts with stimulants such as caffeine and sugar to give us enough energy to get us through the day. But, at what cost?

Typically, most people adapt very well to the stresses of life, but for many of us chronic stress has become a common part of life. We continually place increased demands on ourselves every day and at some point there's a breaking point. We try to juggle the stressors of the workplace, relationships, families, while trying to find time to exercise. More and more, we're placing a greater amount of stress on ourselves than our bodies can cope with. In fact, a recent health care report estimated that 75 to 90 per cent of visits to primary care physicians are related to stress - either acutely or because of chronic problems associated with stress.

Stress Control System

Our body has a complete stress modulation system in place, and the control centre is the adrenal glands. These two small glands, each about the size of large grapes, sit atop the kidneys. The glands work by producing and releasing hormones that help our bodies' response to stress. So, when an individual is suddenly stressed, the adrenal glands orchestrate the "fight or flight" response, preparing the body to deal with the situation head on by producing and releasing hormones such as epinephrine (adrenalin), norepinephrine and cortisol, among others. This response is actually a very good thing, and "stress hormones" are vital as coping mechanisms. Without them, your heart rate wouldn't increase as you run, nor would you be able to mobilize stored energy from your cells, negating any exercise beyond a few minutes.

'Too much'

With an overload of continued stress the adrenal glands are constantly stimulated to produce stress hormones as our body's way of coping. Eventually, the adrenal glands have difficulty keeping up with the constant demands and become limited in their ability to adapt. In essence, when these glands become dysfunctional, our body's ability to handle stress diminishes. Described as "adrenal fatigue," this condition manifests as a number of symptoms, one of which is exhaustion that doesn't resolve with typical rest and relaxation. Marked by a continual deterioration of everyday functioning, depression and decreased performance are the essential hallmarks.

Adrenal fatigue has a broad spectrum of non-specific yet often debilitating symptoms.

The onset of this condition is often slow and insidious. In fact, many symptoms of "overtraining syndrome" are similar so athletes sometimes lay off training for a period of time, to no benefit. And, more commonly people are told they are stressed and simply need to learn to relax. In fact, many

people end up taking anti-depressants because the symptoms are so similar. This often makes the condition worse as the root cause is left unresolved. Over time, the condition worsens.

Diagnosing Adrenal Fatigue

For an accurate diagnosis to be made it is important to look beyond laboratory tests and symptoms alone; the entire picture needs to be examined. If one is seeking diagnosis and treatment for adrenal fatigue, be sure to find a health professional familiar with its diagnosis and treatment.

If you have any number of the above signs and symptoms, consult your health professional for evaluation. Once you have ruled out other organic pathologies, it is time you consider adrenal fatigue as a possible cause. None of the signs or symptoms by itself can definitively pinpoint adrenal fatigue. However, when taken as a group, these signs and symptoms do form a specific adrenal fatigue syndrome or picture - that is of a person under stress. These signs and symptoms are often the end result of acute severe or chronic excessive stress and the inability of the body to reduce this stress.

Treatment of Adrenal Fatigue

Once adrenal fatigue is suspected, a number of effective treatments are available. Typically, it is treated using a two-pronged approach.

First, a combination of nutraceuticals (specific professional-grade nutrients), herbal medicines and replacement hormones is required. The consensus approach is the application of several specific vitamin combinations in therapeutic amounts to replenish the constituents necessary to produce stress-related hormones. Some people who suffer from adrenal fatigue also have multiple endocrine imbalances, including sub-clinical hypothyroidism, insulin resistance, and estrogen dominance. These need to be optimized, as well.

Second, lifestyle adjustments must be made, specifically to each person's needs. In highly active athletes, sometimes a reduction in training for a period of time may be part of the treatment, while in sedentary people, light exercise may be part of the prescription. Adrenal recovery is a process akin to running a road race, but it can be done easily and painlessly, one step at a time. Once you're on your way, it will feel as though the system is being energized and life will become more enjoyable.

Key symptoms of adrenal fatigue:

- Tendency to gain weight and inability to lose it, especially around the waist.
- High frequency of getting the flu and other respiratory diseases. Symptoms tend to last longer than usual.
- Reduced sex drive.
- Difficulty waking up in the morning and feeling un-rested.
- Unable to remember things.
- Lack of energy in the mornings and energy crashes in the afternoon between 3 to 5 p.m.
- Often feel tired between 9 and 10 p.m., but resist going to bed.
- Need coffee or stimulants to get going in the morning.
- Crave for salty, fatty and high protein food such as meat and cheese.
- Increase symptoms of PMS for women.
- Decreased energy, fatigue, and increased injury and difficulty healing.
- Feel better when stress is relieved, such as on a vacation.
- Sighing and the need to take a big breath several times a day.

Other signs and symptoms include:

- Mild depression;
- Food and or inhalant allergies and an upset stomach;
- Increased effort to perform daily tasks and lethargy;
- Decreased ability to handle stress and increased nervousness;

- Dry and thin skin;
- Hypoglycemia; and
- Low body temperature.

Simple lifestyle adjustments:

- Avoid very low calorie diets, especially for prolonged periods of time. Low-calorie dieting is a major stress to the body.
- Use stress reduction techniques.
- Avoid overtraining by keeping workouts intense, but brief (certain stress-related hormones rise sharply after 45 to 60 minutes of strength training).
- Avoid overtraining by matching your intensity, volume and duration to your recovery ability. Decrease your training frequency, and/or take a layoff if necessary.
- Maximize recovery after workouts with proper nutrition: Consume a carb-protein meal or drink immediately after your workout.
- Avoid or minimize use of stimulants/depressants - caffeine, ephedrine, alcohol. Keep hydrated and get eight hours of sleep.
- Stay well hydrated. Some studies suggest dehydration may raise stress-related hormone release.

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"Too Tired to Exercise" first appeared in the 2010 May/June Multisport Issue of IMPACT Magazine.