Information to Optimize Your Health & Fitness, Naturally

Adrenal Fatigue: Why is this important to athletes?

Stress is everywhere, and is increasingly categorized in any number of ways. Chronic and acute, stressors are both physical (training or starvation) and mental (emotional). Either way, the body is equipped with a highly complex system of hormones and neurotransmitters specifically designed for dealing with stress. Regardless of its form, stress can cause the body to react in certain, predictable patterns.

The primary response to any type of stress is an increased production of the hormone cortisol by the adrenal glands. Cortisol is basically responsible for ensuring that you and your body get through the stressor at hand. Too much stress leads to too excessive cortisol followed by to little cortisol over time. As you can imagine, this has many negative effects on your body.

If you are over 30, and you do as much as you can to take care of yourself including exercising and eating well, you may have noticed that slight spread appearing around your midsection despite your best intentions. This is primarily due to the long-term effects of elevated cortisol in your body. Too much stress also leads to what is known as adrenal fatigue. Simply put, the adrenal glands get "tired" and the regular production of cortisol (which changes throughout the day according to sleep and wake patterns) becomes erratic. This can cause and contribute to many symptoms, such as:

- Sugar craving
- Morning fatigue
- Tendonitis & bursitis
- Slow workout recovery
- Slow healing from injury
- Sensitivity to chemicals
- Feelings of burnout
- Difficulty sleeping
- Depressed mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Decreased ability to deal with stress in general

Fortunately, there are several ways to address adrenal fatigue. This involves testing cortisol levels (generally by collecting saliva), addressing dietary factors (high cortisol leads to protein wasting in the body, or muscle breakdown), and nutritional and botanical support. Utilizing this approach, the adrenal glands can be "fed" the appropriate materials it needs to maintain normal, balanced cortisol production.

For many of us, our first response when we feel fatigued is what...to drink more coffee or other forms of stimulation. This is the exact opposite of how to treat fatigue.

Caffeine, or other stimulants (ephedra) do nothing to add energy into the body. They only increase the rate at which your metabolism runs, similar to pushing the gas pedal in a car. Yes, the car moves faster, but more gasoline is being consumed. The same for the body; we feel more energetic, but at a cost as our adrenals are pushed even harder to produce cortisol. Don't get me wrong, a cup of coffee a day is probably OK for the majority of people. But when it becomes more than this, take a look at your adrenals!

As winter recedes, our thoughts turn to more intense training and more frequent competition. Applying adrenal support at the onset of training will serve to prevent adrenal fatigue and the numerous ill effects it has on performance.

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