Recognizing and Addressing “Adrenal Fatigue”

When we experience stress, our adrenal glands produce cortisol. In a stressful situation, this hormone protects us by giving us the “oomph” we need to fight or take flight. But when stress is prolonged, our adrenal glands can’t keep up with demand. As they become depleted, our levels of a pituitary hormone – prolactin – rise. Together with excessive cortisol, this increases our sensitivity to pain.

When we’re suffering from Adrenal Fatigue, what might otherwise be a little muscle pull becomes a full-blown backache. In fact, the nerves of the brain become so over-sensitized that even a tiny twinge can trigger a severe headache or migraine.

SYMPTOMS

There are many signs that stress is taking its toll. One of the most common is that you are increasingly susceptible to colds and infections. Cortisol raises blood sugar which bumps up insulin levels which cause blood sugar to drop and leave you craving sugary foods. You may experience increasingly frequent – and painful – backaches and headaches. Fatigue – chronic tiredness even after you’ve had sufficient sleep. Trouble thinking clearly or finishing tasks. These are just a few signs of Adrenal Fatigue. They can also be signs of other medical problems so you should talk with your doctor.

NATURAL PREVENTION

Alleviating Adrenal Fatigue helps your body recover its balance. It can also help reduce migraine frequency and intensity. Again, talk with your doctor. Of course, the main goal is to reduce the stress that triggers cortisol in the first place. Here are some simple, practical steps you can take:

- Eat small meals and snacks throughout the day to keep blood sugar levels constant.
- Reduce (or even better, eliminate) sugar, alcohol, and caffeine.
- Make sure you’re getting enough magnesium – it’s known as “nature’s tranquilizer” for its calming effect on the nerves.
- With cortisol making the brain hypersensitive to pain, consider supplements to help reduce inflammation and keep brain blood vessels more toned and resilient.
- Keep a journal to record when, how and why you’re feeling stressed. Sometimes just focusing attention on where we’re experiencing stress can help us get back in balance.
- Exercise is good, but keep it easy – think easy walks or a gentle swim – so you don’t physically overtax your already stressed body.
- Get a good night’s sleep, and make it regular so your brain can develop a healthy sleep-wake cycle.