

Managing Stress over the Holidays

The holidays are a busy time for many of us. Balancing work, along with our increased social calendar, late night over indulgences and financial pressures adds to our stress levels. If you are finding it increasingly difficult to wake up in the morning, crave salty foods, lack motivation or sex drive and feel fatigued all the time regardless of how much sleep you get, that may be a sign of adrenal fatigue.

The adrenals are two small glands that sit on top of each kidney. These glands are responsible for releasing our stress hormones cortisol, epinephrine, norepinephrine in response to physical or emotional stress. In addition, the adrenals play role in females providing a secondary source of estrogen and progesterone and therefore are particularly important during menopause. I often find that many women who suffer from PMS or are experiencing difficult menopause tend to have low adrenal function.

Adrenal fatigue occurs when our stress levels exceed our body's capacity to compensate and recover. As a result, our adrenals become fatigued and are no longer capable to respond adequately to further stress. It's important to note that stress comes to us in many different ways be it physical, psychological, emotional or environmental. They can all contribute to adrenal fatigue. Furthermore, poor eating habits, exposure to toxins, lack of sleep, excessive exercise, smoking, and drinking too much coffee also tax our adrenals. Ironically, many people who suffer from adrenal fatigue rely on coffee, and other stimulants in a misguided attempt to keep their energy levels up. But stimulants weaken the adrenal glands exacerbating the problem, and so we drink more coffee, creating a vicious cycle.

But all is not lost. You can recover from adrenal fatigue by maintaining a healthy diet, getting a good night's sleep, avoiding stimulants, managing your stress levels and taking nutritional supplements to aid recovery through the advice of a Registered Holistic Nutritionist or Naturopathic Doctor.

As we enter the busy holiday season, be kind to your adrenals by following these suggestions to help keep stress levels in check:

- Delegate! Remember that you aren't a super hero and you can't do everything. Ask for help and delegate some household chores, grocery shopping and childcare responsibilities to other family members.
- Learn to say no. I know it can be hard especially if you are always the one who people look to expecting things to be done. Pick a few things that you truly enjoy doing and say no to the others, including attending some social gatherings.
- Eat a healthy diet Adopt a nutrient rich diet. Eat only the highest quality foods and stay away from junk and processed foods. Avoiding sugar and white flour products. Ironically, these are the foods that many people suffering from adrenal fatigue love to eat. Eating them in excess leads to hypoglycaemic symptoms (highs and lows), which only aggravates the adrenal glands even more.
- Avoid Stimulants caffeine, alcohol and drugs, which over-stimulate the adrenals.

- Relax – through moderate exercise, meditation, yoga, time for yourself, and learning to balance your work and home life; Spending fifteen minutes a day doing something that brings you joy.
- Get some sleep – strive to get between 7-8 hours of sleep a night. Sleep in a dark, cool, quiet room. You should be in bed by 10pm and asleep by 11pm for optimum rest.
- Reduce your exposure to Toxins - avoid pesticide and chemical pollutants as much as possible. Buy organic when you can and look for more natural beauty and cleaning products.
- Spend Time with Love Ones – Spending time with those you love brings joy into your life and relieves stress. Managing your workload and saying no will give you more time to spend with those you love and do things that bring you pleasure.

Enjoy the holidays!