

An Unknown Epidemic—Functional Hypoadrenia

By Craig Rubenstein, D.C.

Do you suffer from allergies, asthma, chronic infections, abnormal fatigue, colitis, gastritis, or any other chronic "itis," insomnia, or hypoglycemia? . . . The list is endless, and might even include mild to severe depression. If you are faced with any of these conditions, you are probably suffering to some extent from functional hypoadrenia.

What is functional hypoadrenia? In order to understand this all-too-common condition, we must first examine the nature and function of the adrenal glands. We are all familiar with adrenalin, one of the many incredible chemicals produced by the adrenal glands. The adrenal glands are located directly above the kidneys, and are composed of two parts—the cortex and the medulla. The cortex, or outer portion, creates compounds that help to control our levels of sodium, potassium, blood sugar, triglyceride, and sex hormones, as well as levels of inflammatory and anti-inflammatory hormones. The medulla, or inner portion, makes compounds that affect our blood sugar level, cause the release of inflammatory and anti-inflammatory hormones, increase our heart rate and blood pressure, and slow our digestion. All these processes are necessary for us to fight or flee from a saber-toothed tiger . . . or the neighborhood mugger.

As you can see, the adrenal glands play a vital role in the functioning of our bodies. When they are not working up to par, any or all of the above functions may be impaired, leading to a wide range of chronic conditions.

What "stresses" the adrenals and causes them to malfunction? Well, you've probably guessed one major cause—good old mental-emotional stress. For some people, this is a major component, while for others, different forms of stress are more influential. These may include: physical stress from working long hours, lack of sleep, hard physical labor, chronic pain, and postural strain; chemical stress from improper diets, medications, food additives, artificial sweeteners, and environmental toxins in our air and water; or thermal stress from overheating or overchilling caused by the repeated transition from very hot areas to very cold areas.

The body's reaction to stress was first described by Hans Selye early in this century. Selye discovered a triad that was always present after high levels of various stresses. The triad included hypertrophy (enlargement) of the adrenal cortex, atrophy (shrinking) of the thymus gland (an integral part of your immune system), spleen, lymph nodes, and all other lymphatic structures, as well as ulcerations in the stomach and small intestine. Of course, depending on the amount of stress you are exposed to, you may not develop all the above conditions, but many functions of your body may be affected.

People inherit their glandular patterns the same way they acquire their looks. Those

who are fortunate inherit very strong adrenals, which may withstand considerable abuse without major problems. The less fortunate inherit weaker adrenals, which are rapidly exhausted when faced with physical, mental, and emotional stresses.

Some of the common warning signs of adrenal fatigue are:

- Tenderness at the junction of the lower rib and the muscle that runs parallel to the spine.
- Inability of the pupil of the eye to maintain constriction when a bright light is directed into it for ten to twenty seconds.
- A systolic blood pressure (the first number in the blood pressure ratio) that does not rise at least four points when moving from a

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recumbent position to a standing position, which is frequently accompanied by dizziness upon standing up too rapidly.

- Weakness of certain leg and foot muscles that relate to the same Chinese meridian the adrenal glands relate to.
- Sacroiliac (pelvic) joint disturbances due to the commonly associated weaknesses of the sartorius and gracilis muscles, which are leg muscles that attach to the pelvis.

Standard laboratory tests that are used to measure adrenal function are designed to check for Addison's disease (a general failure of the adrenal glands) rather than for functional hypoadrenia, which has been considered a sub-clinical disorder (undetectable in standard laboratory tests). Fortunately, some high-tech laboratory testing is now available to measure the state of the adrenals. One such test measures the levels of cortisol (your body's natural cortisone) at four different times during the day along with your DHEA (a hormone precursor) output. The measure-

ments are taken from saliva samples, which allow for home collection without any blood testing necessary. This test is a highly reliable indicator of your adrenal health. Urinary tests to help increase adrenal function can also be performed from an early morning urine sample which measures sodium output—which is under adrenal control if the kidneys are functioning well.

Adding applied kinesiology to the examination of hypoadrenia is an easy way to correlate and monitor progress through the use of manual muscle testing. When used in the treatment of a patient with hypoadrenia, applied kinesiology allows for hands-on methods—such as reflex techniques and acupressure, cranial sacral therapies, spinal manipulation, and nutritional supplementation—to be done with greater ease and less guesswork.

All forms of holistic healthcare help to restore and maintain the proper function of the adrenal glands. Treatments which help the body function as a whole, ranging from acupuncture or nutritional supplementation to homeopathy or biofeedback, dramatically decrease the stresses that lead to hypoadrenia.

In our daily lives, we must do our best to reduce the chemical, structural, and emotional stresses that we face. Many of us need help in determining and dealing with the sources of our chemical, structural, and emotional stressors, and this is where applied kinesiology and other forms of holistic healthcare can be of great service. Once these sources of physical, chemical, and emotional stress are diagnosed and treated, the adrenal glands can perform their vital range of functions in the body at more optimal levels.

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