



Cortisol: The Stress is On!

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CORTISOL: The Stress is On!

The term cortisol conjures up images in recent TV ads, a rotating profile of abdominal obesity. The commercials are quick to prove that cortisol will “*increase the storage of body fat*” but the ads never explain... **WHY??** Cortisol is an extremely powerful stress hormone released by the adrenal gland’s cortex.

A base amount of serum cortisol is normal and necessary; cortisol rises in the early morning hours and ebbs down toward late evening. This basal level is imperative to daily functioning and the normal rhythms of wake & sleep. Even the occasional crisis release of cortisol can be beneficial, as long as the stressor is resolved through fight or flight. The monumental life stressors...*escaping, surviving or fighting* must eventually find resolution. The resolve causes cortisol levels to return to normal.

Trouble begins when chronic stress is unresolved.

‘Tis the Season for Stress...

When stressors in our daily life never get resolved, adrenaline becomes exhausted. ***Cortisol steps in where it doesn’t belong!*** Christmas shopping to do, another quick deadline, dance recital at 7:00, and don’t forget, the reoccurring family tension at home...*we cannot live in a state of chronic stress without paying an extremely high price!*

Actually, it’s not even the externals that cause the stress, it’s how we view life. People who bottle up their worries and paint on a smile seem to suffer far more than those who “lose it” quite often!

The most toxic of all stress is actually *perceived* stress. For example, people raised in a dysfunctional/crisis family often become adults who struggle with trust & security.

Stress? Who Me? No, Not Me!

These adult children perceive “stress & threat” even in the most benign & safe situations. Chronic, unresolved stress literally becomes normal at work, at home & in most primary relationships.

Adrenaline will do the job for a while, but eventually, cortisol will need to take over. Many individuals immersed in chronic stress are oblivious; it feels “normal” to them. Denial is very common, because the internal stress response can actually enable & energize people to temporarily repress the reality of their situation.

Belly fat, high fasting glucose or disease may be the first indicator of a deeper problem.

“The mighty oak was once a little nut that stood its ground.”



Denial is Not a River in Egypt!

Cortisol issues are multifaceted; the emotional/psychological retraining of the “little child” inside each of us is crucial to healing! That little child needs to learn how to trust in order to shut off the “fight or flight” response. However, if denial lasts long enough, a deteriorating bill of health will point to the deeper story.

When the brain perceives a small stress, it signals for the adrenal gland to release adrenaline. Adrenalin stimulates the liver to release glycogen (sugar) for extra energy. For example, when startled, the face becomes flush, heart rate gets rapid, blood pressure goes up & blood sugar rises, this is a typical stress response. For monumental stressors, the adrenal gland elects to release *cortisol*. Cortisol is so powerful, it inhibits other body systems ... digestion, immunity, metabolism...in attempt to conserve energy. This response can be helpful for true “fight or flight” situations.

Cortisol: The Bully in the Blood

However, when cortisol is chronically over released, it leads to...high fasting glucose, low lean body mass, slow metabolism, high % of belly fat, chronic constipation, low immunity, high blood pressure, premature aging, degenerative disease and cancer. Furthermore, cortisol not only releases sugar from the liver, it also generates even more glucose through the wasting of muscle tissue. ***Cortisol is like a torch wasting the muscles into sugar*** (high fasting glucose).

Eventually, the adrenals will burnout. At burnout, the adrenal glands are exhausted & fail to produce the base level of hormone necessary for health & survival. The body goes into a code red! This lack of appropriate stress hormone is the precursor to degenerative/autoimmune diseases such as fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome.

Now What Can I Do?

Know the aforementioned signs of high cortisol! Cortisol saliva testing is helpful. The test will chart the daily rise & fall of cortisol to determine flooding or exhaustion. If you suspect cortisol flooding, *cut back on cardio & pump up the weights!* Excessive cardio increases cortisol demand, while strength training stabilizes blood sugar & repairs/builds muscle.

Talk with our Master trainers about customizing your workouts to avoid burnout. *And, do your emotional homework; the little child inside you is dying to grow up!*