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7 Adaptogen Herbs to Lower Cortisol

Dr. Axe, May 11 2016.

It's likely that you've heard about the detrimental effects of the stress hormone cortisol. Elevated cortisol levels and chronic stress can affect every physiological system in your body, including your thyroid and adrenal glands. It can make you anxious and irritable, lead to weight gain and bone loss, contribute to diabetes and heart disease risk, and deplete your energy levels. Cortisol is also known as the aging hormone. When cortisol gets too high, it puts you into a "fight or flight" response, which stimulates your sympathetic nervous system and your adrenal glands. When this occurs, there is a decrease in your digestive secretions and an increase in blood pressure. This puts your body in a state of constant stress, which will burn out your adrenal glands, stress your digestive tract and cause you to age more rapidly.

So what can help us adapt to stress and lower cortisol? Adaptogens ... So if you want to look younger, feel younger and be healthy — and heal adrenal fatigue — you must get your cortisol levels balanced. Side effects of chronically elevated cortisol can include:

- Anxiety
- Autoimmune diseases
- Cancer
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Common Colds
- Hormone imbalance
- Irritable bowel disease
- Thyroid conditions
- Weight loss resistance
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• **Top 7 Adaptogen Herbs**

1. Ginseng

Benefit-rich ginseng is the most well-known adaptogen, and Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*) is

considered the most potent. According to Wallace, research has validated Asian ginseng's use for improving mental performance and your ability to withstand stress. This red ginseng also has antioxidant effects, antidepressant effects, and can help naturally lower blood pressure and blood sugar levels. There are a number of adaptogens referred to as ginsengs that aren't technically ginsengs, but keep in mind that they have similar composition or effects.

2. Holy basil

Also called tulsi, holy basil is known in India as the "elixir of anti-aging." Preliminary studies suggest that holy basil benefits include helping you fight fatigue and stress; boost your immune system; and regulate blood sugar, blood pressure and hormone levels.

3. Ashwaganda

Ashwaganda is often referred to as Indian ginseng. Often used in Ayurvedic medicine, ashwaganda regulates the immune system and eases anxiety. Ashwaganda has been used in Eastern medicine for over 2,500 years and has immuno-modulating effects that boost your immune system and aid the body in lowering cortisol levels.

4. Astragalus root

Used in Chinese medicine, astragalus boosts immunity and buffers the effects of stress. It increases the amount of anti-stress compounds our bodies use to repair and prevent stress-related damage. It may also reduce the ability of stress hormones like cortisol to bind to receptors.

5. Licorice root

Licorice root can increase energy and endurance, boost the immune system, and protect the thymus from being damaged by cortisol, but its use requires professional supervision because of how it may affect blood pressure.

6. Rhodiola

Rhodiola (*rhodiola rosea*), or golden root, is a potent adaptogen that has been the focus of much research. Rhodiola provides a buffer to stress-related mental and physical fatigue. According to Whitcomb, Rhodiola was used by Russian cosmonauts, athletes and military personnel, and years of study have begun to uncover the very mechanisms by which it acts as an adaptogen. Rhodiola rosea contains a phytochemical known as salidroside. This component helps relieve anxiety and combat aging. Rhodiola suppresses the production of cortisol and increases levels of stress-resistant proteins. Studies have found that it restores normal patterns of eating and sleeping after stress; lowers mental and physical fatigue; and protects against oxidative stress, heat stress, radiation and exposure to toxic chemicals. Rhodiola also protects the heart and liver, increases use of oxygen, improves memory, and may even extend longevity. Also, new research proves it's effective as a weight loss agent.

7. Cordycep mushrooms

Cordyceps, reishi, shiitake and maitake mushrooms are fungi with antioxidant properties. That means nutrition-rich mushrooms have all the benefits of antioxidant foods. They may not be adaptogens in the classic sense, but each has adaptogenic, anti-tumor and immune-enhancing properties. Eating well, getting proper rest, staying active, writing down what you're grateful for and maintaining social connection all help protect you from chronic stress, which can kill your

quality of life. Adding adaptogens to your routine can make you even more resilient to the damaging effects of high cortisol levels.