Adrenal Dysfunction

What is adrenal dysfunction?
Adrenal dysfunction is a decrease in function of the adrenal glands that characteristically manifests as a reduced output or alteration in the diurnal pattern of adrenal hormone secretion including cortisol. People suffering from decreased adrenal function commonly complain of fatigue but may also experience sleep disruptions, weight changes, salt and/or sugar cravings, allergies, anxiousness, nervousness, low blood pressure and numerous other symptoms.

Who experiences adrenal dysfunction?
Saliva testing reveals that adrenal fatigue is widespread in the United States. Functional Medicine clinics have observed that over 85% of patients are experiencing some level of adrenal dysfunction or adrenal fatigue. Adrenal fatigue does not discriminate — it may be experienced by men as well as women, and it can occur at any age. Today many individuals in their early twenties are already experiencing adrenal fatigue.

What causes adrenal dysfunction?
Adrenal dysfunction results from continuous or sudden stress. It may begin abruptly, or as a result of periods of prolonged, repeated stress. Sources of stress may be positive or negative and include (but are not limited to):

- Recurrent disease and illness
- Physical stress – injury, diet, surgery, tobacco/alcohol addiction, etc.
- Emotional stress – marriage, divorce, death of a loved one, strenuous work relationships, a new baby, financial insecurity, etc.
- Environmental stress – chemical pollution of air, water, food, etc.

Phases of adrenal function and fatigue:

| Phase 0 | Healthy adrenal response (cortisol levels within optimal range with desired diurnal rhythm) |
| Phase I | Early adrenal dysfunction (elevated/high range AM with HPA blunting thereafter); acute fight or flight (increased HPA tone); HPA axis dysfunction (zigzag patterns, or cortisol rising at night) |
| Phase II | Evolving adrenal dysfunction (within range or low AM cortisol with HPA blunting thereafter) |
| Phase III | Established adrenal dysfunction / Hypoadrenia (hypofunction of HPA axis) |

Adrenal support

Successful support and treatment protocols for all people suffering from decreased adrenal function include:

- Lifestyle modification to include exercise, healthy sleep patterns with ideal sleeping hours of 10pm – 9am, balanced diet high in vegetables and including healthy fats and proteins, frequent laughter and deep breathing exercises.
- Avoidance of food allergies/sensitivities, caffeine, alcohol, and refined sugars

Individualized treatment plans may include the following depending upon the saliva testing results (phase I, phase II or phase III):

- Supplementation of dietary cofactors necessary for adrenal function including Vitamins C, B5, B6 and E
- Adaptogen therapy including licorice, rhodiola, etc.
- Adrenal glandular supplementation
- Physiologic cortisol supplementation
- Phosphorylated serine (elevated cortisol levels only)

It is important to note that the different stages of adrenal dysfunction may all present with the same symptoms, yet treatment protocols can be significantly different depending on the diurnal pattern and volume of cortisol production for each individual patient. Testing adrenal function is a critical first step in devising the correct treatment plan for your patients. The Labrix Adrenal Treatment Protocol handout contains further details on specific treatment recommendations.

Health Disclaimer: All information given about health conditions, treatments, products and dosages are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. This is provided only as a suggested guideline.