

Managing Your Stress via Lifestyle and Botanicals

Article 4

When it comes to addressing chronic stress and HPA-dysfunction, nutrition can act as the base of your self-care regimen to support the body and manage stress responses (as discussed in the first three articles). These additional lifestyle choices and botanical supplements have shown to support the HPA-axis and stress responses. Consider these additional tools to your self-care routines.

Sleep Quality

HPA-D can disrupt and override your normal diurnal sleep patterns by raising cortisol levels in the evening which prevents melatonin release (hormone that makes you sleepy) making it hard to fall asleep, stay asleep and wake up in the morning¹. In a report review, chronic sleep deprivation has been reported to increase appetite, inflammation, blood pressure, glucose and insulin blood levels. It can lead to memory impairment and an increase in anxiety and depression². It's critical to get your proper sleep! According to the Sleep Foundation, adults require 7-9 hours of sleep each night³ and sleep hygiene is recommended if you are experiencing disturbances in your sleep. Sleep hygiene means creating habits to promote sleep⁴ outlined by the Sleep Foundation.

- **Allow 30 minutes to wind down before bedtime.**
Identify what helps you calm down such as drinking a cup of herbal tea, stretching, taking a bath in low light, listening to calm music, reading or journaling.
- **Dim the lights.** Our natural circadian rhythms are light sensitive so allowing darkness encourages the body to release melatonin to sleep.
- **Remove electronics.** Allow up to an hour before bed to be electronic free. Our devices tend to create mental stimulation and emit blue light which may decrease melatonin production⁵.

Add some botanical power to your stress management

Adaptogens

Adaptogens are edible plant extracts that help modulate the body's stress response⁶ to maintain homeostasis or balance. For example, if there is too much of one hormone, adaptogens can help lower it, and on the flip side, if there isn't enough of a hormone, adaptogens can replenish its levels⁶. Research has also shown that adaptogens interact with our immune and endocrine system to boost immunity⁶. In 1948 and through the 50s, Soviet researchers began identifying adaptogens' ability to enhance physical and mental performance under stress. Their findings included some of the better known and researched varieties in the Araliaceae family, *panax ginseng* (Korean ginseng), *eleutherococcus senticosus* (Siberian ginseng)⁶, while other well-known adaptogens continue to be researched including *withania*

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somnifera (Ashwagandha), *Rhodiola rosea*, *Glycyrrhiza glabra* (licorice), *Ocimum tenuiflorum* (Holy Basil) and many more.

Adaptogens can interact with medications – consult your doctor

Although adaptogens are herbs with gentle side effects, there are warnings to consider. Before starting any adaptogens, consult your primary care, functional medicine doctor or naturopath to help identify which adaptogens might be right for you.

Cannabidiols or CBD

You've probably heard about cannabidiols or CBD which has had a boom in popularity becoming one of the latest health and wellness alternative remedies to hit the market. It can be found in a range of products from topical salves to high potency tinctures. One of the reasons for this boom in popularity is that CBD has shown to assist in hormone regulation, immune functions, sleep, anxiety and stress responses⁷. CBD, unlike its cousin cannabidiol THC, is not psychoactive, and has been proven to have minimal side effects and is safe with no potential for abuse or addiction⁸.

CBD has been shown to:

- Manage inflammation, dampen stress responses and reduce anxiety⁹
- CBD has a much higher antioxidant ability than vitamin C and E¹⁰ reducing inflammation caused by stress
- CBD can activate serotonin receptors to allow the brain to process stress more effectively⁹
- CBD can decrease cortisol levels to increase quality of sleep, and in more serious cases, assisted with epilepsy, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases¹¹

Much more is being learned about CBD and larger scale research projects need to be conducted, but for now, we know there is significant research pointing to benefits of CBD and its results in improved stress management. If you choose to try a CBD, look for a high quality, full-spectrum blend from companies that report their lab analysis and ingredients. At this time, CBD is not regulated by the FDA and it's up to the consumer to do their due diligence. This [CBD guide from the Ministry of Hemp](#) can be a helpful starting point to determining high quality CBD.

Move Your Body

There are multitude of reports and studies showing that exercise can be helpful in stress management as it increases insulin sensitivity meaning your body is responding better to blood sugar levels¹². And exercise can result in an elevated mood because of the extra endorphins and neurotransmitters that are released during exercise¹³ and can even reduce pain¹⁴. Keep in mind that exercise is a stressor itself on the body, so if you are experiencing HPA-D, it is worth starting slow with the exercise, until your energy levels start to return.

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Meditation

Meditation is becoming more and more popular in the U.S. and for good reason. Research has confirmed an amazing range of health benefits associated with the practice of meditation including stress reduction, decreased anxiety, decreased depression, reduction in pain (both physical and psychological) and improved memory¹⁵. Physiological benefits included reduced blood pressure and heart rate, reduced cortisol levels, improved oxygen utilization and carbon dioxide elimination - and the list of benefits goes on¹⁵. A regular meditation practice appears to reduce anxiety and to develop qualities associated with self-actualization, such as inner peace, satisfaction, and creativity¹⁵. Through meditation, we can watch our thoughts and mental quality – the quality of your thoughts greatly manipulates how your body responds to stressors¹⁶, and meditation is another tool for stress reduction.

Connect with nature

We have evolved dramatically from our ancient relatives who were one with nature and it makes sense that we are biologically wired to have that connection. The concept of forest bathing (where you actively are present with the sights, sounds and smells of the forest) have shown to reduce blood pressure, improve immune functions, as well as psychological effects of alleviating depression and improving mental health¹⁷.

You Are Unique - Responses to Stress

We all perceive stress differently – we are intelligent, emotional and sensitive beings and we've been shaped by our own personal experiences. Our bio-individuality cannot be ignored and through the process of thousands of studies on stress, it's only more obvious that stress is perceived in the eye of the beholder¹⁸. A review of many studies¹⁸, have found that an individual's ability to cope and respond to stress are based not only on the stressor (new or familiar stressor, how threatening it is perceived to be, etc.) but on innate qualities such as age, gender, and hereditary predisposition, coupled with personality characteristics (introversion or low self-esteem) and prenatal and early childhood experiences, serve to further individualize and amplify unique stress responses^{19,20}.

This is not a sign of weakness or strength but rather a testament to your individual experiences that make up your beautiful, unique self. And **It's important to get the individual unique support you need via nutrition, botanicals and lifestyle interventions which can greatly impact your ability to cope with stress.**

If you are looking for additional support, nutrition guidance and wellness/lifestyle coaching, reach out for a free consultation.

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