

# Video Podcast: Adrenal Fatigue - Part I of II

by Elizabeth Lipski, Ph.D., CCN

*(MUSIC)*

Hi, I'm Dr. Liz Lipski, director of doctoral studies at Hawthorn University and the author of DIGESTIVE WELLNESS. Our topic for today is Adrenal Fatigue. Do you sometimes feel wired and tired? Do you feel like you get into bed and you're so exhausted yet your heart is racing and you just can't fall asleep? Do you feel like sometimes you wake up in the morning and you just don't feel refreshed? You might be suffering from adrenal fatigue.

In a medical dictionary, if you actually talk to your physician about adrenal fatigue, they're looking for tumors on your adrenal and other really nasty diseases of the adrenal glands. But in a complementary or integrative medical world, we see adrenal fatigue all the time. It's not a disease, it's just that your adrenals are tired. They're saying, "Oh please don't make me do more. I'm already so pooped out." I think the rise of the coffee generation and us living on caffeine has a lot to do with how hard we push ourselves, because every time we have a cup of coffee what it does is it stimulates the adrenal to release a hormone called glucagon. And glucagon allows our body to raise blood sugar and then we don't feel so tired anymore.

The same thing happens when we're under stress. When we're stressed out our body again starts producing glucagon and adrenaline and our blood sugar levels come up. The same thing happens when we smoke cigarettes, which is one of the reasons why it's so hard to stop smoking cigarettes is because caffeine, stress and nicotine all stress the adrenals when they're feeling battered and blue. And how I always think of it is

that people's blood sugar levels, they just don't stay even. So let's say I have adrenal fatigue and I get up in the morning and I'm feeling a little bit low and I don't feel like doing much, and then I have that cup of coffee. It gives my adrenals that big jump start, that kick. And the reason why that is is because the adrenals are supposed to wake up first thing in the morning with the sun. Which is why your small children wake up so early and you go, "Who's going to get up today to deal with the baby or the toddler? Because I really need to get some sleep." Their adrenals are working great. But when our adrenals aren't working great we wake up in the morning and we want a cup of coffee or we want something to get our system kicked into gear. So we end up feeling wired and tired. Many people who have adrenal fatigue, they kind of drag themselves around all day and then some time in the middle of the afternoon or around 5 or 6pm, all of a sudden they're rearing to go. It's like all of a sudden their adrenals turn on. But the natural rhythm of the adrenal's production of cortisol which is what keeps us awake and alive and keeps our immune system working and functioning really well, is that it's very high first thing in the morning and as the day goes down, our levels by noon start moving further down and down until by dinnertime they should be nice and low. But for many of us, by the time we come home from work it's time to start cooking dinner, doing homework with the kids, putting kids in the tub, getting them to bed, doing laundry, paying bills and so many of the other things that just there wasn't time to do during the day at all. So what happens is that our adrenals try to kick us into gear later. Many people who have adrenal fatigue find that by after work, that's it. All they can do is go to work, come home, eat dinner and get into bed. Other people get into bed

by eight o'clock or nine because that's all the energy they have. But then there's this whole other type of adrenal fatigue person who's starting around six or seven o'clock at night, starts to feel really great. And these people find that they kick into gear somewhere around nine or ten o'clock and by midnight or two they're really cooking and they find it hard to go to sleep at all.

So what can we do about this? And what are the adrenals anyway? The adrenals are small, little organs about the size of walnuts that sit on top of each of your kidneys. And they're really important in so many ways. The adrenals are the home of our endocrine hormones, including estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone. So they're the key to our hormone balance. And what they're made out of is cholesterol. Cholesterol is the substrate that all of our adrenal hormones are made out of. And then they get turned into all these sex hormones and also get turned into something called cortisol, which is the natural thing that we use when we're coming under stress. So if you imagine that you've almost hit somebody with your car, or you're riding your bike and somebody almost hits you, and you know that big feeling of "Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, oh my god, what happened just then?" And you're heart's racing and everything's going. Well, your body has just released huge amounts of cortisol and adrenaline to help you deal with stress. And what it has done is it has increased your heart rate, it's brought increased circulation to your limbs so that you can run and get out of trouble. It's made you super strong and it's made you focused on survival and what's most important in front of you. So digestion kind of slows down. Non-essential functions in the body slow down and it's one of the things that occurs. So when you look in our culture, aren't we pushing ourselves most of the time? Aren't most of us pushing ourselves with energy that we don't have all day long? Feeling

like, you know, the most common complaint that people go to see a doctor for is fatigue. Eighty percent of people don't have as much energy as they'd like to have. And it's because we're pushing and we're using sugar and caffeine and nicotine and stress for energy rather than running on our own energy.

Also, adrenals help keep our blood sugar levels even, again, to keep our energy levels even. Now, we also get to women, as they come into peri-menopause and they become menopausal, the adrenal glands are the main organ that produces progesterone. And what happens is that we start needing more progesterone relative to estrogen as we start going through menopause. So by this time our adrenals go, "Wait a minute. You've been pushing me around for years now, decades. And you're now asking me to do more?" And the adrenals just go, "I can't do any more. I'm pooped." And so as women start going into menopause their blood sugar levels start getting even less and less even and they start feeling like they're even more tired, they're more moody, they cry, some women get depressed. All of this has a lot to do not only with hormone levels but also the fact that the adrenals have lost their resiliency.

When our adrenals aren't working exactly correctly what it feels like to us is that we don't have any resilience or elasticity in our own bodies. So for me, when my adrenals are feeling shot, I might have one good day where I work really hard and then the next day I'm just completely crispy and wiped-out and don't feel like I have energy to do anything. And that's where most people would reach for caffeine or sugar. For me, I like to run on the energy that I have, so I don't use caffeine. I don't use nicotine. And I do try to get more exercise, because exercise can make us feel really great and give

our adrenals more energy. And give us more resilience.

Some of the many things you can do is that there is salivary testing for DHEA and cortisol, which are two of our main adrenal hormones. It's best to do this kind of testing when you do it four times in a day. So you test your saliva at 8 o'clock in the morning, around noon, around dinnertime, and then again around midnight. And by that we can actually look at the different rhythms of your adrenal hormones and see how well your cortisol level is working.

I'm going to continue this podcast in a second part where we're going to talk about recovering from adrenal fatigue. So I hope you'll look at that one too. And until then, be well.