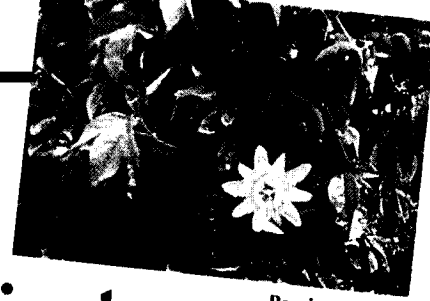


Self-help strategies for zapping the effects of chronic stress



Passion flower

By Patty A. Harder

Long ago, the human body was equipped with a fight-or-flight mechanism to deal with life-threatening situations, such as a confrontation with a saber-toothed tiger. Today, humans experience stressors that are far different from our early ancestors. Instead of battling four-legged foes, we are faced with a barrage of smaller battles which aren't immediately life threatening.

The physical effects of feeling constantly overwhelmed are cumulative. Without realistic ways for handling stress, the body will feed on its energy reserves and fatigue will result. While some stress is necessary, there are steps you can take to combat the weariness experienced when your body is in a constant state of fight or flight.

Support for the adrenal glands

"It is our adrenal glands," explains Ralph Golan, M.D., in *Optimal Wellness*, "that buffer stress and enable us to stand up to life's onslaughts." Suppressed adrenal function resulting from chronic stress can lead to fatigue, nervousness, the inability to concentrate, insomnia, and other serious health issues. *Optimal Wellness* lists **Siberian ginseng** as "one of the more important herbs for the adrenals."

In *The Healing Power of Herbs*, Michael T. Murray, N.D., says, "Siberian ginseng does possess adaptogenic properties; that is, the ability to increase nonspecific body resistance to stress, fatigue, and disease." Adaptogenic herbs are those which have a balancing or neutralizing effect on the body, which increases our resistance to stress. Murray writes that "the mental and physical anti-fatigue effects of ginseng have been demonstrated in both animal studies and double-blind, clinical trials in humans."

"**Licorice root**," explains Golan, "is an equally important adrenal herb because it increases cortisol half-life and is extremely useful in correcting low cortisol states, giving the adrenal glands a relative rest and a chance to restore."

Calming herbs

First described for the Western world over 200 years ago by Captain James Cook, the calming properties of **kava** can benefit the chronically stressed. "Kava drinkers," reports Murray, "relate a pleasant sense of tranquillity and sociability on consumption." He goes on to say that, "Several European countries have approved kava preparations in the treatment of nervous anxiety, insomnia, and restlessness on the basis of detailed

pharmacological data and favorable studies." Research has shown that kavalactones, the pharmacologically active ingredient in kava, exhibit sedative, analgesic, anticonvulsant, and muscle relaxant effects.

Long used for its calming attributes, Goldan defines **chamomile** as, "A mild sedative used for treating nervousness, restlessness, and insomnia." Often consumed as a soothing tea, chamomile is considered a "nervine" herb, or one that is calming to the central nervous system.

Another herb in the nervine classification is **passion flower**. As Golan points out, it is most often used as a sedative — either alone or in combination with other calming herbs — for nervous disorders. In addition, passion flower has also been used to treat gastrointestinal distress due to nervous conditions and is known to be analgesic in nature.

Vitamins for vitality

The **B-complex vitamins** are necessary nutrients for the body's metabolic processes. Included in this category are thiamin (B-1), riboflavin (B-2), niacin (B-3), pyridoxine (B-6), cyanocobalamin (B-12), folic acid, pantothenic acid, and biotin. Those who are chronically stressed may become deficient in the B-complex because of the high metabolic activity that is required to maintain the fight-or-flight response. When dealing with fatigue, Golan recommends that we "Take a high-potency B-complex formula (50 to 100 mg a day) or a daily multiple vitamin/mineral with at least 50 mg of the B vitamins."

Also of benefit to those experiencing stress is **vitamin C**. It helps form collagen and gives strength to cartilage, bone, and connective tissue. It is also a powerful antioxidant, supports the adrenals, helps to detoxify the body, and supports immune health. "Vitamin C plays an important role in the maintenance of health and the treatment of disease," says Golan.

Stress is an integral part of life. But with self-help strategies, such as proper diet, adequate amounts of rest and exercise, along with supplementation with herbs and vitamins, regaining your natural energy is certainly within your reach.

REFERENCES

- Golan, Ralph, M.D. *Optimal Wellness*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995.
Murray, Michael, T., N.D. *The Healing Power of Herbs*. Rocklin, Calif.: Prima Publishing, 1995.