



Cortisol, Stress and Your Health

August 2009

Cortisol is sometimes referred to as the stress hormone and is a key component in the "fight or flight" response providing us with an extremely quick and powerful burst of energy. It is also important for energy recovery after stressful events. In small amounts Cortisol helps us by heightening memory, enhancing immune response, and increasing pain tolerance.

Cortisol levels are naturally lowest at night while we are sleeping and peak in the morning to help us wake up and get our day going. Cortisol assists with the regulation of many bodily functions including; blood sugar metabolism, blood pressure, insulin release, immune system functioning and dealing with inflammation.

Cortisol can become damaging when levels are elevated for extended periods of time, most often because of stress. High levels of Cortisol over prolonged periods of time can lead to a number of issues including; increased abdominal fat, heart disease, blood sugar imbalances, decreased bone density and muscle mass, elevated blood pressure, and lowered immune response, among many others.

In order to keep levels of Cortisol optimal it is important that it be depleted quickly after stressful events. One of the best ways to rebalance Cortisol levels is to employ stress management techniques that invoke the body's relaxation response (parasympathetic nervous system) allowing the body to come back to a calm state. Simple techniques like breathing exercises, yoga or meditation will bring your Cortisol levels back down and over time will habituate your body to respond to stress with the relaxation response.

Cortisol is a beneficial hormone secreted by the adrenals to help our bodies cope with emergencies. The constant state of alert created by chronic stress can lead to high levels of Cortisol which over time can lead to a number of serious health issues. The best way to ensure optimal levels of Cortisol is to reduce stress and engage in activities that invoke the body's relaxation response.

Brian Madigan

(604) 626-6277

brian@endworkstress.com