

The Effects of Adaptogens on the Physical and Psychological Symptoms of Chronic Stress.

Abstract

Stress is a state of disharmony or threatened homeostasis. The maintenance of homeostasis in stages of internal or external challenges, called stressors, requires constant adjustments of a hormonal, behavioral, and autonomic functions. The nuances of life may bring about unwanted stress to the human body. Some of the top causes of stress in America include work, finances, relationships, and health. There are numerous physical and psychological symptoms which are associated with long-term “chronic” stress which includes chronic fatigue, frustration, irritability, insomnia, frequent headaches, chest and back pain, weakness, and weight gain or weight loss. The symptoms of stress are associated with depression, anxiety, hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and even cancer. Stress causes a systemic elevation of the steroid hormone cortisol. Some of the symptoms of elevated cortisol levels include anxiety, depression, hypertension, stress-related fatigue, insulin resistance and obesity. Stress-related fatigue is a form of occupational stress, for example, it can often induce long-term exhaustion and diminished interest, producing a condition known as burnout syndrome. This syndrome is characterized by high levels of emotional exhaustion (EE) and depersonalization (DP) in relationships with a reduced level of personal accomplishment (PA). Adaptogens are plants that help your body adapt or adjust to stress. True adaptogens should protect against stress, stimulate mental performance, and normalize body functions. They allow the human body to achieve optimal homeostasis by either down-regulating hyperactive organ systems or up-regulating hypoactive organ systems. Numerous previous studies have shown how these herbs have been beneficial to people suffering from chronic stress. The aim is to review the scientific literature regarding the effects of three adaptogen herbs (Ashwagandha, Rhodiola, and Bacopa) on cortisol levels and the symptoms associated with physical and psychological stress. Specifically, I want to examine the effects of these adaptogens on stress-related elevated cortisol levels, fatigue, and cognitive function.

Keywords: Stress, Fatigue, Cortisol, Adaptogens, Ashwagandha, Rhodiola, Bacopa