James Wilson, MD

Treating the Adrenals in Cases of Decreased Immunity and Cancer

Cubberly Community Center
4000 Middlefield Road, Room H1, Palo Alto, California

February 12, 2004 at 7:00 PM

Meet Dr. James Wilson

During his 24 years of private practice Dr. Wilson has helped hundreds of paients with adrenal fatigue regain their health and vitality. He has been invited to lecture at medical seminars such as ACAM and A4M on adrenal functions, other endocrine imbalances and their impact on health. With a researcher's grasp of the science behind adrenal function and a clinician's understanding of its human impact, he has helped many understand the physiology behind the condition.

He holds three doctorate degrees and two master's, from different disciplines. He received his PhD. in human nutrition from the University of Arizona, with minors in immunology, microbiology, pharmacology and toxicology. Dr. Wilson also holds degrees in Doctor of Chiropractic and Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine. His master's degrees are in bio/nutrition and experimenal psychology. He was one of the founding fathers of the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in Toronto. He is listed in the International Who's Who in Medicine and currently resides in Tucson, Arizona.

Treating the Adrenals In Cases of Decreased Immunity And Cancer

The image that many people conjure up when they hear "adrenal glands" is of an adrenalin-pumping emergency calling up superhuman strength - like the often-repeated story of a 100-pound woman lifting a car off her pinned child. It's true that such situations have happened and the adrenals are indeed the glands responsible for these amazing acts. However the real heroic role the adrenals play in overall health is unknown to most people, even those in the health profession. These two little glands about the size of a walnut and weighing only 5-8 grams evolved to ensure man's survival throughout the millenia and continue to do so today - with some modern complications.

The adrenal glands are necessary for life and health. They continuously respond to the many internal and external deviations from optimal physiology that occur every day, helping to maintain the delicate balance called homeostasis. One of their most critical functions is to orchestrate a physiological response to stress that promotes survival (fight or flight) yet protects that internal balance. To do this they manufacture and secrete over 20 hormones such as cortisol, cortisone, DHEA, DHEA-S, testosterone, pregnenolone, estrogen, progesterone, androstanedione (an androgen), and aldosterone that circulate to and affect nearly every cell and system in the body, including the immune system. These adrenal hormones are intimately involved in such diverse mechanisms as energy production, fluid and electrolyte balance, fat storage, sex hormone production, blood pressure, tissue repair, control of inflammation, healing, and immunity.

The modern complications to this beautifully designed adrenal system, and the reason it must be considered in any illness or therapy, arise from the nature and amount of stress we're subjected to these days. It's no longer a case of: see a lion - run, feel hunger - hunt, meet an enemy - fight. Many of the stresses we experience (and there are so very many) have no appropriate physical action to take in response. We can't run from problems at work, exercise whenever we're hungry or wrestle our mothers-in-law to the floor. Yet our adrenal glands still function as though we could. Whether we're stressed mentally, physically or emotionally, our adrenals prepare us to take action. If we don't, or can't, all those circulating adrenal hormones start to create problems instead of solutions. When stress is repeated, chronic or severe, the adrenal system becomes depleted and insufficient hormones are generated to maintain the balance. In either case, there are undesirable health consequences that are as diverse and far-reaching as the actions of adrenal hormones themselves.

Popular medical opinion suggests that only two types of functional problems occur with the adrenal glands: the drastic over-activity known as Cushing's Syndrome and the relative failure known as Addison’s Disease. Both represent severe deregulation of adrenal function that can

result in medical emergencies or even death if not treated promptly. However, low adrenal function ranging between normal and Addison's is much more common and can also wreak havoc on our health and our lives. Astute physicians and researchers have historically recognized this depleted condition but its proper diagnosis and treatment are rare in mainstream medicine, even though it is epidemic in our society.

In the varying levels of depletion that comprise Adrenal Fatigue Syndrome many physiological changes are taking place. Among these is a decrease in overall immune function, making people with Adrenal Fatigue more vulnerable to infection and other types of illness. For example they typically catch more colds, flu and other respiratory ailments. When they become ill, they take longer to recover because of the lowered levels of circulating adrenal hormones that stimulate energy production and other restorative functions. Their decreased immunity also makes it more likely they will become re-infected during the recovery phase. No doubt their immune resistance to more serious, pathogenic disease processes is compromised as well.

This reduced immune function involves both aspects of the immune system: humoral immunity manifested as antibody (B-lymphocyte) activity and cellular immunity which involves the actual interaction of white blood cells with pathogens and cancer cells. The humoral system is adversely affected because Adrenal Fatigue's decreased levels of the anti-inflammatory cortisol cannot overcome the inflammatory reactions of IgG, IgM and IgE antibodies. As a result people with Adrenal Fatigue suffer more from allergies and related illnesses. The decreased levels of cortisol also adversely affect the cellular immune system because cortisol helps modulate the reaction of white blood cells such as T- lymphocytes, killer cells and macrophages that are involved in the hand-to-hand combat with pathogens, including cancer cells.

Proper functioning of the cellular immune system is paramount in the body’s ability to seek out and destroy cancer cells. Without adequate cortisol levels, the killer cells do not have the voracity to annihilate cancer cells, macrophages cannot follow through as a secondary defense and the T-lymphocytes are not cued to respond as rapidly. As a result the coordinated efforts of the immune system to fight malignancy are impaired.

The interrelationship of Adrenal Fatigue and cancer can play out in two different scenarios. In one, the adrenals are already fatigued and their decreased function contributes to the disease process. In the other, adrenal function is adequate at the outset of the cancer, but as the malignancy progresses the physical, emotional and mental stress of the disease brings on Adrenal Fatigue. How important a factor is Adrenal Fatigue in cancer? Some studies have shown that there is a connection between cortisol levels and survival time for cancer patients. Adrenal function also very definitely influences the quality of life for people with cancer. Those who retain or regain adequate adrenal function have much better energy and appetite, less

depression, and generally experience a greater overall sense of wellbeing.

Adrenal Fatigue plays another indirect role during the course of cancer and other chronic illness. In situations where there is a caregiver assisting the patient, the caregiver is also more likely to succumb to Adrenal Fatigue. Care giving can sometimes be as stressful as the illness. Studies have shown a greater than normal incidence of death among caregivers that is directly attributable to the stress of caring for the loved one. These studies were controlled for factors such as age, sex, socioeconomic level, activity level and other relevant parameters that could have otherwise influenced the results. This finding is not surprising because the emotional and physical stress involved in caregiving can be overwhelming. The consequent Adrenal Fatigue brings with it a variety of health problems ranging from lowered immunity to depression and exhaustion that can all make the caregiver more vulnerable.

Therefore, in cancer (as in all states of chronic illness) it is important to consider the importance of the adrenals in the overall therapeutic picture. Ignoring adrenal function in either the cancer patient or the caregiver can cause a much worse prognosis and decreased quality of life.

Although Adrenal Fatigue Syndrome is rarely recognized in doctors' offices, it is relatively easy to identify. One of its most distinguishing characteristics is a particular pattern of low energy and fatigue. Typically people with Adrenal Fatigue find it hard to get up in the morning, even if they have had 8 hours of sleep, and often do not fully wake until after 10 AM. In the afternoon they commonly experience a period of low energy and fatigue sometime between 2-4 PM. The length of this low varies from 30 minutes to 2 hours. But then, as though someone turned on a switch, they come alive at 6 PM (or after their evening meal) and have their best hours of the day until around 9:30 PM. If they fight off their body's message that it's time to go to sleep, they sometimes get a second wind around 11 PM that allows them to read, work or play until 1:30-2:00 AM. They may comment that they do their best work after midnight and get their most refreshing sleep between 7-9 AM. However, as their adrenals become more fatigued, most are forced by tiredness to give up the late night hours. In addition they may complain of muscular weakness, that they are not as strong as they should be or used to be. Mild depression or a generalized apathy leaves them feeling somewhat helpless, hopeless and in a quiet state of despair. Tasks they used to fly through now take more effort and, at times, the thought of having to do one more thing is enough to make them feel overwhelmed. Not surprisingly, they also have an overall decreased ability to handle stress.

People suffering from Adrenal Fatigue frequently display common dietary patterns. Many crave salt or salty foods such as corn or potato chips and usually depend on salt and foods high in fats, especially fats combined with caffeine or sugar, for stimulation to keep going. They often develop hypoglycemia (chronic low blood sugar) and need to eat frequently or at a specific

time, especially if they are under stress. There's a tendency to skip breakfast but be ravenous by 10 AM. It's not unusual for those heading towards Adrenal Fatigue to gain weight, particularly around the middle (the spare tire look), because of their tendency to drive themselves with high calorie foods and to overeat for fear of running out of energy.

To determine the presence of Adrenal Fatigue, a simple paper and pencil test is often all that is needed. The definitive Adrenal Fatigue questionnaire is found on Page 61 of his book, Adrenal

Fatigue: the 21st Century Stress Syndrome. An abbreviated version can be found at www.adrenalfatigue.org., the most comprehensive website on Adrenal Fatigue and the only website solely dedicated to helping people with this health condition. Dr. Wilson suggests going to the website first and taking the test posted there. If your Adrenal Fatigue score indicates, then get a copy of the book and use the information from both the book and the website. The book was written as a guide to recovery from Adrenal Fatigue and contains a depth of information that isn't on the website, however the website is updated regularly with new information. Using them together seems to benefit people most.

Understanding Adrenal Fatigue and its proper treatment increases the likelihood of successful recovery and improves the outlook for cancer and other immune health problems. The complete therapeutic process is laid out on the website and in the book in much greater detail than is possible in this brief article, so I will not reiterate it here. However it is important to realize that recovery does take time - from 6 months to 2+ years depending upon the completeness of the therapy, the severity of the Adrenal Fatigue and the other health issues that need to be addressed. Recovery also requires implementing lifestyle and dietary changes and the introduction of specific dietary supplements that actually help reconstitute the adrenal glands. Another important fact to note is that no drugs are usually necessary. Pharmaceuticals are only needed in the most severe cases, those near actual Addison's Disease. For everyone else, complete recovery is possible and probable with proper treatment. We have had many people report success without ever consulting a doctor. It is encouraging to know that people with Adrenal Fatigue heal themselves in the majority of cases.

Future Speakers:

March 18 (3rd Thursday) Karen Brown and Frank Hu (Kaiser Hospital) on Theory and Practice of Accupuncture

** April through December 2004 meetings will be on the 3rd Thursday of each month. **

Smart Life Forum