

Have you been under stress for more than six months?

If so, you're likely suffering from a shortfall of the hormone DHEA, which can lead to tiredness, insomnia and lowered immunity. Here, three revitalizing remedies.

Millions of busy women spend their days feeling exhausted (yet unable to sleep), tense, moody and on edge, thanks to a stress-induced shortage of *dehydroepiandrosterone* (DHEA), says Hyla Cass, M.D., author of *8 Weeks to Vibrant Health* and a former assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

DHEA, also known as “the mother hormone” because it’s so crucial in regulating other hormones, is produced by the adrenal glands. Normally DHEA rises and falls in tandem with changes in levels of the stress hormone *cortisol*, acting as a buffer against the negative effects that excess cortisol can have on immunity, sleep and energy. But when nonstop stress leaves cortisol levels elevated for months on end, the overworked adrenals can’t pump out enough DHEA, resulting in fatigue, sleeplessness and irritability.

The good news: Boosting DHEA levels generally results in better mood and well-being (plus enhanced libido, according to one study). But doctors warn against taking DHEA supplements since some brands may contain as much as 150 percent more than the amount stated on their label, and taking too much can lead to acne, facial hair and cholesterol problems. Luckily FIRST found three no-risk natural ways to send DHEA levels soaring and restore complete vitality—pronto.

DHEA booster: Breaking your worry cycle

Adults who learned techniques to react to stress positively and calmly experienced a 23 percent reduction in cortisol levels and an impressive 100 percent

increase in DHEA levels in one month, according to a study by the Institute of HeartMath in Boulder Creek, California, and the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. Subjects also reported feeling happier, more vigorous and less burned out.

“When you short-circuit emotional stress, you prevent the physical cascade of hormones that leads to low DHEA,” explains Dr. Cass. One stress-fighting tactic to try is called “freeze frame”: Instead of panicking when your boss unexpectedly moves up a deadline, for example, “freeze” for a few seconds to focus on something joyful, like a childhood memory of playing at the beach or a favorite pet nuzzling up to you. Then take a deep breath and start to “frame” your thinking around ways you can find the time to meet the deadline, such as sidelining another project or postponing a lunch date.

DHEA booster: A handful of nuts

The easiest way to bring levels of DHEA back to normal? Eat nuts, which are rich in magnesium, every day. “Magnesium calms all the nerves in the body,” says women’s health specialist Christiane Northrup, M.D., author of *Women’s Bodies, Women’s Wisdom*.

The mineral also counteracts high levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which naturally brings DHEA levels into better balance, explains Marcelle Pick, a certified nurse practitioner and author of *Are You Tired and Wired?* Yet almost 70 percent of us fail to get the daily value of magnesium—320 mg—say researchers at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston.



The solution? It’s as easy as switching up your snacks. According to Pick, every time you swap out high-carb chips or sugary candy for a handful of nuts, your adrenals get precious healing time because they don’t have to work so hard to keep blood sugar and cortisol levels stable. You can get the same effect by eating green leafy vegetables, fish, oatmeal or yogurt.

DHEA booster: A walk in the park

When researchers at the University Medical Center Utrecht in the Netherlands examined the amount of DHEA in 860 postmenopausal women, they found that those who were regularly active boasted levels that were almost 25 percent higher than in those who were not. “Exercise stimulates DHEA production and reduces excess cortisol,” says Dr. Cass. Just 20 to 30 minutes of physical activity four times a week—working hard enough to break into a light sweat—will rejuvenate DHEA production, and you should start to feel results in the first week.

Short on time? Even an occasional vigorous workout can boost levels of this energizing hormone, say researchers at Japan’s Nippon Medical School. They found that a morning stroll in a suburban park triggered a significant 10 percent jump in DHEA levels that lasted more than 24 hours. ❁