

Running on Empty

This phrase conjures up images of your car running out of fuel while you are driving, with no available gas station to fill up your tank. Running on empty also refers to a condition where you keep pushing your body to go, and it has no more available fuel to use. This is not a reference to making sure that you have eaten a sufficient quantity of food. Running on empty refers to the reduced function of the hormonal system.

The job of the hormonal system is to activate your entire body and keep it going all day. A normally functioning hormonal system would enable you to easily jump out of bed in the morning. How many of you have to drag your body out of bed and get something like a cup of coffee in order to function? If you are tired in the morning and/or need caffeine to get going, your hormones are not doing what they should.

If you experience fatigue after lunch or midday, or reach for something sweet to eat to get some energy, again your hormones are not functioning well. Your hormonal system should be providing your body with energy to function throughout the day, and allowing you to relax and sleep at night. If you are having any difficulty getting to sleep, staying asleep or waking up frequently during the night, your hormonal system is out of balance.

In addition to fatigue, the other indicators of a hormonal system that needs help include sugar and/

or salt cravings, weight gain, pain, hair thinning or loss, cold hands and feet and feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Stress is one of the major reasons that the hormonal system fails to do its job.

Too much stress can play havoc with the hormonal system. Ongoing or chronic long term stress adversely affects the ability of your body to continue to make the hormones needed for daily function. The stress response of the body burns out over time, causing fatigue, insomnia, altered mood, lack of motivation, poor digestion, decreased sex drive, irritability, depression, sugar cravings, chronic pain, inability to stay asleep, osteoporosis, weight gain, and more symptoms.

Other than symptoms, how do you know if your hormones are functioning? We now have a method of simply and effectively measuring your hormones through your saliva, which can be done in the privacy of your home. Saliva tests have been available since the 1970's. They easily and effectively measure whether you are running on empty or not. Saliva testing is a pre-diagnostic test to determine the functioning levels of your hormones. These tests show how much hormone reserve you have, and whether you are headed for burn out. The tests are simple to do, and are available through most knowledgeable wellness physicians.

There are several saliva tests available that can measure anti-aging hormones, sex drive hormones, and reproductive hormones. One of the most com-

prehensive saliva tests measures these hormones in addition to sugar handling ability, immune fighting ability, different food allergens, and the adrenal hormones. This type of saliva test helps to identify the specific stage of your adrenal hormone function.

The adrenals are the major glands that produce hormones that help the body cope with stress and generate energy, especially after the body reaches age 30. If your adrenal glands are not working well when you are in your 30's, you will have a more difficult time with energy and overall health in your 40's, 50's and 60's. The key to health is to keep the adrenal glands working well, and working in harmony and balance with the rest of the hormonal system.

In evaluating the adrenal portion of the saliva test, there are 3 different stages of adrenal function. Hans Selye first defined the stages of adrenal function in his book titled "Stress Without Distress" first published in 1974. Dr. Selye called these stages The Alarm Reaction Stage, The Stage of Resistance and the Stage of Exhaustion. Clinically these stages exist, and parallel the life of most people, as Dr. Selye observed. The Alarm stage usually occurs in childhood, the Resistance stage occur mid-life, and the Exhaustion stage occurs in the oldest generation, as the body ages.

During the Alarm Stage the body is in an emergency crisis state. In this stage the adrenals are producing excessive hormones in response to stress. The entire

system is in hyper drive, where the body has seemingly unlimited energy. In this stage the body is unable to relax easily, and energy seems endless. Have you ever watched a child just play non-stop? Children and teens can just keep on going, until exhausted, then get some sleep and do it all over again. But, as the body becomes older, it cannot keep up this high level of hormone production, and begins to feel fatigued and stressed out.

As the body enters the teens and twenties, other stressors develop that the body has to respond to. Dietary habits are one of the major stressors that the body has to deal with on a daily basis. Then there are others stressors from physical pain, toxic chemical exposure, dehydration, nutritional deficiency, food allergies, environmental allergies and unresolved emotional issues. When these stressors are not resolved, and the adrenal output remains high, other hormones are affected.

As the high demand for hormone output continues, the body attempts to cope or adapt to the on-going stress. During the next stage, the Resistance Stage, the body it is unable to reduce the stressors. The adrenal output begins to decline rapidly as the adrenals begin to fatigue. The overall energy and health of the body declines in a parallel path to the declining hormone levels. This decline can occur at any age, but can be slowed and often reversed.

The Exhaustion Stage is the final stage of adrenal function, where the body is unable to continue to respond to the ongoing stress. The adrenal output continues to decrease due to the prolonged and unhandled

stress. The entire system is in a fatigued state where the body is unable to function properly. The end result of this stage is adrenal fatigue and burnout. It is at this stage that the body attempts to function while running on empty.

There is a natural solution to help repair hormonal imbalance, regardless of the stage of hormonal function your body is in. Various alternative approaches to repairing hormonal imbalances range from dietary and lifestyle changes to bio-identical hormone replacement therapy. Consult a holistic wellness physician to find out more about your hormones, what stage of hormonal function your body is in, and what can be done to rejuvenate your hormones. Remember, it is better to check your fuel levels now, so that your body doesn't have to be running on empty in the near future.



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Disclaimer: The recommendations in this article are not to be taken as medical advice. Please consult a qualified health care practitioner to obtain your own hormone evaluation, and for specific recommendations on your personal hormone issues.