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Tired All the Time is a condition that has been named by GPs because it is believed to affect as much as 25% of the adult population and yet Adrenal Fatigue is a problem that is little understood or recognised by the medical profession despite being described in medical texts of the nineteenth century.

Doctors seem to be failing to recognise adrenal malfunction in all but the most serious cases, such as Addison's Disease (extremely low cortisol) and Cushing's Syndrome (extremely high). Why? Perhaps it is because conventional blood and urine tests are so inaccurate, unlike saliva testing, which also doesn't cause any acute stress in obtaining a sample! Results of adrenal function testing prove to a client that their subjective interpretation of their stress levels, which is often underestimated, has real biochemical consequences that they should be taking more seriously.

There is good medical evidence to show how chronically elevated levels of cortisol will affect our health, for example:

- In 1999, researchers in Sweden showed that elevated levels caused reduced sex-hormone levels and decreased libido;
- In 2000, Yale University (USA) researchers published a report which shows how emotional stress contributes to weight gain in both slim and overweight women. They concluded that the excessive secretion of cortisol through stress was most likely having adverse metabolic effects.

So, cortisol levels are elevated in response to a stressor, or even multiple stressors (physical, mental or emotional) and if your levels are still high towards the latter part of the day it will hamper your ability to relax and fall asleep. In 2001, sleep researchers from the University of Chicago reported new evidence that inadequate sleep may promote the development of insulin resistance, which relates to the development of Type II diabetes. They compared people who kept normal sleeping hours (7 ½ - 8 ½ hours per

night) with those who kept short sleeping hours (less than 6 ½ hours per night). They found that the short sleepers secreted 50% more insulin compared to normal sleepers. This is what happens during the natural course of the ageing process; as we sleep less our cortisol levels rise and insulin resistance begins.

The long-term results of sleeping less than about 8 hours a night are problems such as: headaches, irritability, depression, anxiety, mental and physical fatigue as well as confusion and even frequent infections (viral and bacterial).

Now we begin to see the debilitating effects of stress on our health.

So what can we do about it?

In a nutshell, lifestyle is an extremely important factor when it comes to stress and many complementary therapies can play a significant role in helping a client whole and heal from the stresses and strains of an overly hectic lifestyle. There are far too many therapies to mention individually and you know best how your therapy can work on aspects of stress, from the superficial to the more profound. It is also worth bearing in mind that unchecked cortisol levels may be having an adverse impact on strategies that you might be proposing for your clients because of its far reaching effects.

Adrenal Function is an often marginalised aspect of health but it is worth remembering the 'stress thing'! TT

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