

- Stress

STOP STRESSING OUT YOUR STRESS HORMONE

Sound sleep, nutritious diet and relaxing exercises can bring down cortisol levels naturally

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As per the National Center for Biotechnology Information, USA, "the major mental health issues reported [in India] were stress, depression, anxiety, insomnia, denial, anger and fear". Covid-19 was the biggest trigger of chronic stress, which could have led to increased cortisol hormone levels, say experts. High stress levels can make you prone to heart attack, shoot up blood sugar, mess with your hormones, stop your periods, lead to obesity and also cause those unexplained headaches.

While we couldn't have blocked stress completely from our lives as we return to normalcy, there is a lot that we can do to reverse the damage caused by high cortisol hormone levels.

Understanding cortisol

- 1 What is cortisol?** Cortisol is produced by the adrenal glands and regulates metabolism, blood pressure and body immune function. It's also known as a life saving hormone. The level of cortisol is high in the morning and low in the evening and can be regulated by a doctor through blood tests.
- 2 The stress part** If a called stress hormone it helps us to fight, fly and fright. Imagine a situation when you are on the terrace and a monster jumps in front of you. Your response will either be fight, flight or fright. This hormone helps us handle stressful situations," says Dr Abhijit Sengupta, endocrinologist.
- 3 Mind the excess** The hormone helps regulate blood sugar, blood pressure, metabolism, respond to inflammation. In it's excess, it can trigger anxiety, depression, digestive problems, headache, heart disease, sleep disorder and weight gain," says Dr Abhijit Sengupta, endocrinologist.
- 4 Cushing disease** The excessive presence of hormones can lead to a condition called Cushing syndrome," says Dr Sengupta. Symptoms of Cushing syndrome could be fatty deposits in the midsection and the face, causing a round face, acne, fatigue, weak muscles, skin fungal infections and diabetes.
- 5 Impact of Covid-19** Chronic stress, confusion, illness, physiological stress are a few reasons for the high level of cortisol. "People are under emotional and mental stress in the pandemic. It's very likely that the level of cortisol has shot up," says Dr Rucha Chaurasia, endocrinologist.
- 6 Aiming for calm** Yoga is immensely beneficial for our mental and emotional well-being. It helps reduce stress hormones, improves our sleep quality and helps in maintaining a healthy relationship with life, handling work routine and adopting a pet can help control cortisol levels. Also, reducing alcohol and caffeine. Herbs such as ashwagandha are also beneficial," says Archana Inara, dietitian.
- 7 The right diet** "Nutrient rich foods such as oranges, kiwi, berries, papaya, watermelon, milki choco, green vegetables, dark chocolate and fish oil help maintain cortisol levels. Also, reduce alcohol and caffeine. Herbs such as ashwagandha are also beneficial," says Archana Inara, dietitian.

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