



# Lifestyle Support Protocol for Adrenal Health

Providers are often surprised when their patients' cortisol levels don't increase when complying with an adrenal support protocol. In general, cortisol levels are slow to rise with treatment, and slower when lifestyle modifications to manage stress are not in place.

Providers are in a unique position to help their patients see the link between chronic stress and health. Each patient is different in how they perceive stress in their lives, whether they feel consumed by it, or if they experience it as a normal part of life. Once assessing their clients' perceptions and experiences related to stress, providers can offer attainable lifestyle modifications.

Below is a detailed list of lifestyle modifications shown to improve stress or modulate cortisol levels. Consider including these suggestions in your treatment plan for your patient.

- 1. Diet:** Consuming excess sugars and carbohydrates will spike blood sugar and insulin levels, leading to a subsequent blood sugar crash. Additionally, stress itself elevates the stress hormone cortisol, and the neurotransmitters epinephrine and norepinephrine which signal the release of glucose from the liver. The pancreas pumps insulin into the blood in an attempt to bring blood sugar levels back down to normal, creating a blood sugar crash, which starts the cycle over again.

The best diet to prevent this roller coaster is one with a low glycemic index. Glycemic index is the numeric scale that ranks carbohydrates based on the rate of their conversion to glucose. Wheat has a very high glycemic index and is highly inflammatory, creating a stress response in the body. Foods with a low glycemic index that help to maintain blood glucose levels are proteins such as lean meats and fish, fats such as coconut and avocado oil, and the complex carbohydrates in vegetables. The Glycemic Index Foundation has an interactive website where you can learn to swap high glycemic index foods for those lower on the scale. <http://www.gisymbol.com/>

- 2. Sleep:** Chronic sleep deprivation has been known to increase appetite, increase levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines, decrease parasympathetic activity and increase sympathetic tone, increase blood pressure, increase evening cortisol levels, and elevate insulin and blood glucose. In short, lack of sleep is a chronic stressor.
- 3. Yoga:** Yoga has been associated with increased GABA levels, and has a greater effect on mood and anxiety modulation than walking. Some recommended yoga apps are: Yoga Studio, 5 Minute Yoga, Daily Yoga.
- 4. Meditation:** Meditation has shown to stabilize blood sugar levels, increase cortisol levels, and increase stress responsiveness. Recommended meditation apps: Insight Timer; Calm; Stop, Breathe and Think
- 5. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** (CBT) is based on the concept that perception influences emotions. When one is in distress, the perspective is inaccurate and thoughts unrealistic. CBT helps people identify and evaluate distressing thoughts in order to affect distorted thinking. With more realistic thinking comes feeling better. CBT has been shown to increase salivary cortisol output, improve sleep and mitigate perceived stress. There are even apps for do-it-yourself CBT!

## References:

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