

The myth behind adrenal fatigue

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Do you feel extremely tired, have body aches or experience sleep disturbances? A simple internet search of these symptoms might bring up a condition called adrenal fatigue. However, Baylor College of Medicine's Dr. Ruchi Gaba warns against taking this term at face value and explains what might really be going on when you experience these symptoms.

"The adrenal glands are small triangular shaped glands located on the top of the kidneys. They are responsible for producing hormones like aldosterone, [cortisol](#), adrenaline and small amounts of sex hormones that help regulate the metabolism, [blood](#) pressure and stress response of the body," said Gaba, assistant professor of medicine in the section of endocrinology, diabetes and metabolism at Baylor.

The current medical science does not believe that adrenal fatigue is a true medical problem, Gaba explained, and there is no scientific evidence to prove that the condition exists. The symptoms attributed to adrenal fatigue – feeling tired, loss of hair, sleep problems, craving salt – are generic and can be caused by a number of reasons including having a poor diet, poor nutrition and poor sleeping habits or having some type of illness.

"When you are feeling run down or you are sick, your adrenal glands are supposed to bump up their [hormone](#) production so it's not true that they can become run down," she said.

Adrenal [gland](#) related problems can be due to deficiency or excess of a

particular hormone and one of these problems that is extremely important to have diagnosed is adrenal insufficiency, Gaba said.

With adrenal insufficiency, enough cortisol and sometimes aldosterone hormone is not produced and that can cause fatigue, dizziness, weight loss and nausea. Patients also can become hypoglycemic if their blood sugar levels decrease, and they can become hypotensive when their blood pressure goes down if they have adrenal insufficiency.

Other [adrenal gland](#) related issues are as follows:

- Cushing syndrome can occur when an excessive amount of cortisol hormone is produced.
- Elevated [blood pressure](#) can happen when an excessive amount of aldosterone is produced.
- When an excessive amount of adrenaline is produced pheochromocytoma can develop.
- Congenital adrenal hyperplasia is a genetic condition which causes the adrenal glands to produce less cortisol and too much sex hormone/androgen.

"Fortunately these conditions caused by over or under production of adrenal hormones are treatable," said Gaba. "And I recommend focusing on good nutrition, healthy eating, exercising every day and getting the proper amount of sleep at night to help improve your overall health so you do not feel as depleted of energy."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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