Could Controling Cortisol Levels Help Alleviate Fibromyalgia Symptoms?

by PUJA RIOS

Cortisol and Fibromyalgia

Every so often, as I'm getting ready in the morning, I see a version of myself in the mirror that makes me want to crawl right back into bed.

Overnight, my face has put on five extra pounds, as if I won a cheeseburger eating contest in my dreams. Not only do I look puffy but I feel puffy too, I have an acne outbreak, extreme fatigue, and brain fog.

This is one frustrating start to the day.

I used to think these episodes were random until I learned about cortisol – nicknamed, "the stress hormone" – a hormone that mediates various metabolic processes, has anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressive properties, and whose levels in the blood may become elevated in response to physical or psychological stress.

Those symptoms I mentioned earlier are signs of high cortisol levels.

Cortisol's Responsibilities

Cortisol wears many hats, check out some of its bigger responsibilities for our symptoms:

1. **Minimizing inflammation.** Keep things like Alzheimer's, arthritis and diabetes at bay.
2. **Keeping us alert.** Literally to survive. Imagine surviving in the wilderness when you hear, "Run! It's a Bear!" Fight or flight?
3. **Fighting off fatigue.** So you can stay awake through a boring movie.
4. **Maintaining a healthy metabolism.** For energy and overall good feels.
5. **Balancing blood sugar levels and blood pressure.** Avoid blurred vision, heart attack, and stroke - not up in here!
6. **Preventing brain fog.** So you remember you left your kid at Target. Whoops!
7. **Assisting with cognitive processes.** Like learning to tie your shoes and hard wiring memories.
8. **Helping to develop the fetus during pregnancy.** For you know, continuing the human race and stuff.

As you can see by the broad scope of the list, we fibro warriors need to pay a lot of attention to our cortisol levels. So many of these are areas we already have difficulties with on a daily basis.

So what can we do to manage?

First, let's acknowledge what can throw our cortisol levels off:

- Stress
- Stimulants
- Sleep
- Diet
- Our state of mind

The Symptoms of Cortisol Levels

Depending on your cortisol levels, you may experience different symptoms I have listed below. You should consult with your doctor about how your cortisol levels may be affecting your fibromyalgia symptoms.

High Cortisol Levels

- Unexplained weight gain
- Moods swings
- Skin irritations
- Simultaneously feeling fatigued and wired
- Low sex drive
- Irregular menstrual cycle
- Swollen face
- Insomnia
- High blood pressure
- Sore and achy muscles
- Frequent urination
- Excessive thirst

Low Cortisol Levels

- Depression
- Halt in menstrual cycle
- Sensitive skin
- Cravings for salty foods
- Dizziness/fainting
- Muscle weakness
- Achy scalp
- IBS Symptoms
- Confusion
- Dark circles under eyes
- Heart palpitations

Build Strategies Into Your Schedule

For me, the number one factor that determines all things fibromyalgia is planning.

Just as we learn to think ahead about pain management by taking vitamins, getting shots and scheduling acupuncture appointments, and how creating a plan to manage our cortisol and fibromyalgia will save us from further pain, frustration and developing additional chronic conditions.

We can learn to anticipate and prevent a percentage of the triggers by adding coping mechanisms into our schedules.

Here’s a list of little things we can do to keep your cortisol and fibromyalgia symptoms in check.

Reading the list is step one, setting up reminders or adding them into your calendar is step two.

- **Bathe in the sunshine.** Treat yourself to a ten-minute daydream, Sit by a window or escape outside.
- **Avoid caffeine and alcohol in the evening.** How about at least most of the time? Especially if you're already stressed.
- **Relaxing music.** Enya is still putting out the tunes, guys. Play it all day or take a break and get lost in it. At a nice low volume, of course.
- **Meditate.** Grab your heating pad and a timer. Even just five minutes a day can keep major stress away.
- **Acupuncture.** Once a week or once a month, for body and mind relief, I swear by those magic needles!
- **Exercise.** Nothing too intense for me. I work with light weights and a slow pace.
- **Eat clean.** The more you do it the better you'll feel. Your body will thank you for not having to work so hard.
- **Consistent sleep schedule.** Your body has a natural rhythm, just like Enya. Listen to it... Just like Enya.
- **Slow down.** Build extra time into your schedule so you have flexibility when things don't go as planned... so like, always.

In Conclusion...

Additionally, learning ways to cope with daily stress and frustration will pay off big time for your keeping your levels balanced. Sure, you're allowed a meltdown but don't let it get its fangs into you.

Once you've locked into a super-stressed mode, it harder to see the way out.

If you commit to even half of these suggestions, before you know it, you'll wake up, look in the mirror and see your beautiful reflection peacefully staring back at you.

Next will come flashbacks to your dream when you visited Cloud 9, where the cheeseburgers are calorie free and the Fountain of Youth is served in a pint glass.