

Combat Holiday Stress, Anxiety, and Fatigue With Adaptogens

By Lynn C. Allison

While the holidays can be a joyous time, for many the season can be overwhelming, resulting in additional stress and anxiety. Adaptogens may be an effective way to help you navigate seasonal stress.

Active compounds found in various plants, herbs, and mushrooms, adaptogens help the body adapt to stress, anxiety, and fatigue. Supermodel Gisele Bündchen swapped nicotine and alcohol for the popular adaptogen ashwagandha to help restore adrenal function and reduce stress, and says it changed her life. Ashwagandha and ginseng are two of the most popular and well researched adaptogens.

“The concept of calling certain herbs adaptogens began with the work of endocrinologist Hans Selye, who was known for his work on the effects of stress on the body,” says herbalist Ellen Kamhi, Ph.D., author of “The Natural Medicine Chest.”

“We all experience stress, but an individual’s ability to resist stressors and adapt to change can be the key to staying healthy.”

Kamhi says that adaptogens, which have been used in traditional medicine for centuries, tend to act gently, so they can be used on an ongoing basis. Modern research has uncovered various mechanisms of action, including reducing cortisol (the stress hormone),

decreasing inflammatory mediators, and helping balance carbohydrate metabolism.

Health Benefits of Specific Adaptogens

Rebecca Kastin, a board-certified health and wellness coach, says that adaptogens can help improve energy and endurance. “Many adaptogens are believed to increase energy levels, reduce fatigue, and enhance physical and mental performance,” she tells *Health Radar*.

In addition, some adaptogens such as echinacea and astragalus are believed to boost the immune system to help the body fight infections and diseases.

Rhodiola rosea and Panax ginseng — also known as Asian or Korean ginseng — are two adaptogens that are believed to improve cognitive function.

Ginseng is commonly used to enhance stamina and endurance and to reduce fatigue, says Kastin. And rhodiola, also known as golden root, dates to ancient times when it was used by the Vikings and the Greeks.

“In Russia and Scandinavia, rhodiola has been used for centuries to cope with the cold Siberian climate and stressful life,” says Kamhi. Studies have found this herb may also help strengthen the body’s response to physical stressors such as exercise and psychological stressors such as fatigue and depression.

Holy basil is another popular adaptogen used to combat stress

and anxiety, notes Kastin. Maca root purports to improve energy, endurance, and libido. It’s often used to combat fatigue and enhance fertility.

Using Adaptogens

“It’s important to note that while adaptogens have a long history of use in traditional medicine systems, scientific research on their efficacy and safety is ongoing,” says Kastin. “Before using adaptogens for any specific health concern, it’s advisable to consult with a healthcare professional, as individual responses to these substances may vary, and there may be potential interactions with other medications or health conditions.”

If you are adventurous, you can learn to identify, collect, and process the wild plants into your homemade remedies, says Kamhi. But if you want convenience, adaptogens are available in various forms, such as herbal teas, liquid extracts, and capsules.

“Because adaptogens are such a hot topic these days, look for manufacturers who have been around for a long time before purchasing any herbal products,” Kamhi tells *Health Radar*. “Many new companies are jumping on the bandwagon. Choose companies committed to good manufacturing practices.”

Nature’s Answer is one that is registered and inspected by the Food and Drug Administration, adds Kamhi. □