Eleuthero, Siberian Stress Buster

KEY WORDS
adapto, ashwagandha, athletic, depression, Dr. Holly Lucille, eleuthero, energy, fatigue, golden root, memory, mood, natural medicine, rhodiola rosea, schisandra, sports performance, stamina, stress, weakness

Dr. Holly is one of the most dynamic people I know. A graduate of the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine in Tempe, AZ, Dr. Holly has a private practice in Los Angeles called Healing from Within Healthcare. Dr. Holly has been a guest on the Dr. Oz Show, discussing natural interventions for stress. Look for her own television show, Myth Defying with Dr. Holly, premiering in the fall on Veria Health and Wellness cable TV channel nationwide. In this show, Dr. Holly will examine erroneous health beliefs and misinformation. Thank you, Dr. Lucille, for all you do to promote natural medicine, and for sharing information with us on some of my favorite herbs in the world: adaptogens!

Chronic Stress Makes Everything Harder
Herbs that can help make it easier again!
Holly Lucille ND, RN

Stress is a word we banter about quite freely. We use it to convey fatigue, nervousness, anxiety, pressure, and even damage to our body. Stress is all those things, and more. Technically, stress is defined as the "pressure or tension exerted on a material object." Exposure to cold can be stress, running for hours can be stress, and experiences such as losing a job or a loved one can be stress as well. Both physical and mental stress evokes changes in our physical bodies, and chronic stress, whether mental or physical, can do real damage. Stress can raise blood pressure, heart rate, blood sugar, and cortisol levels; it can interfere with sleep, wound healing and healthy digestion; and it can suppress the immune system, which is why chronic stress is linked to catching more colds and flu. Chronic stress can even put you at a higher risk for certain cancers.

This article will discuss ways to protect the body from the dangerous effects of chronic stress and help us thrive, even in the face of difficulties and challenges. One of the most powerful tools in my natural medicine toolbox is a selection of herbs called "adaptogens." You’ve heard of the fight or flight response? Well, there is a third way: adapt!

Energizing Eleuthero
One of my favorite herbs to help people thrive despite stress is Eleuthero (Eleutherococcus senticosus), formerly called “Siberian ginseng,” though it is not in the ginseng family. It is native to far Eastern Russia (naturally), northern Korea, China, and Japan.

Eleuthero has been found to help reduce the physical responses to stress – those "pit of your stomach" feelings that make challenging days even worse.

This plant medicine has also been associated with improved mental health, increased physical endurance, stronger immune health, and reduced levels of cortisol – the “fight or flight” hormone that can cause that stressful spiral to get even worse.

Eleuthero has been clinically studied, too. In one double-blind study, participants age 65 and older used the herb or a placebo for a total of 8 weeks. Surveys taken by the participants showed that Eleuthero group was already noting better mental health and more comfort in social situations at just 4 weeks.

In a double-blind study examining the cardiovascular response to stress and eleuthero, those in the eleuthero group showed a 40% reduction in their heart rate when responding to a standard clinical stress test.

Another controlled clinical trial studied the effect of eleuthero for individuals with chronic fatigue syndrome, a notoriously difficult to treat condition with multiple contributing factors to consider. While the overall study wasn't statistically conclusive about the effects of eleuthero, those in the herb group noted less fatigue and a definite improvement.

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Other scientific research shows that eleuthero may be just the ticket to help you get through those days when you haven’t had enough sleep the night before. A lot of us love coffee or tea, but after a certain amount, you’re just getting jittery – not more wakeful, and definitely not less stressed. Eleuthero has the potential to help you– here’s that word again – adapt – to the circumstances and take the day in stride.

For anyone interested in getting a bit more exercise, eleuthero is the perfect workout partner, too. It has been shown to enhance physical endurance and help the cardiovascular system keep up the pace.

Additionally, if you’ve ever noticed that you tend to get a cold more often during (or right after) periods of intense stress, it’s because your body is using up its energies just trying to get you through that time of crisis, and can’t put as much effort into dealing with threats to the immune system. Well, with eleuthero, you’re in luck: it doesn’t just keep you feeling balanced, it actually activates the immune system and inhibits common viruses.

The key compounds from eleuthero that are responsible for these remarkable abilities are called “eleutherosides” and are standardized from the root of the plant.

Powerful Partners for Stress Protection
There are other excellent, clinically proven adaptogenic herbs, and I recommend three in particular. Better yet, find them in a formula together with eleuthero for really powerful, overall stress support.

Some of my favorites include rhodiola, ashwagandha, and schisandra.

To your good health,
Terry... Naturally

More...
Eleuhtero, Siberian Stress Buster

Rhodiola (Rhodiola rosea) is another one of nature’s amazing herbs. Used in natural medicine for generations, it improves calmness while increasing energy and concentration. For those times when you feel tired or slightly stressed even before you begin your day, rhodiola can help give you a mental energy boost that can get you started.

Like eleuhtero, rhodiola has been clinically studied and shown to enhance concentration and physical stamina.

In one double-blind, placebo-controlled study, rhodiola showed a marked improvement in fighting fatigue, and in another, a significant improvement was seen in participants in the rhodiola group for mental fatigue, physical fitness, and overall well-being. Yet another clinical study focusing on fatigue associated with night duty for young physicians showed an improvement in the rhodiola group for total mental performance – important for anyone working over the evening hours, but especially critical in this case.

One study looked more specifically at physical stress factors: reaction time, speed, strength, and attention. The result? This double-blind, placebo-controlled study showed an improvement in endurance exercise capacity after just 4 weeks of use. So again, like eleuhtero, rhodiola is another botanical that will help you meet your physical goals as well as the demands on your mind and attention span.

It’s perfect for anyone with an ‘on-the-go’ lifestyle because it is so effective at reducing acute stress. Compounds from the root of the plant called “rosavins” are responsible for the abilities of rhodiola. Here again, you want to find a standardized extract so that you know you’re getting the concentrated benefits of the plant.

Interestingly, despite the fact that rhodiola can help give you the energy and clarity you need, it does not contain caffeine, nor will it affect your blood pressure or heart rate. That is part of what accounts for the feeling of calmness – you just feel better. And, conversely, it is not a sedative. So even though you’ll get past that “revved up” feeling that stress can bring about, you won’t feel like taking a nap, either.

A frequently utilized adaptogen in Ayurveda is ashwagandha (Withania somnifera). One of the oldest healing systems in the world, Ayurveda has been practiced in India for over 5,000 years. Practitioners of Ayurveda incorporate diet, meditation, breathing, yoga, purification (detox), massage and herbal extracts in their treatment plans to restore patients to a state of balance and good health.

Traditionally, ashwagandha is used to relieve anxiety, reduce inflammation, and as an anti-inflammatory. Like the other botanicals we’ve looked at, it is recognized as having the special ability to be simultaneously energizing while being calming, too.

Understandably, these effects make ashwagandha a natural stress reliever. Research studies have found that ashwagandha not only reduces stress by decreasing cortisol levels, it can significantly reduce anxiety as well – by over 50% in one clinical trial (as measured by a standard anxiety rating scale). Ashwagandha has also been shown to increase physical energy and stamina, and even relieve stress-related male infertility.

It is able to protect the body from the adverse effects of chronic stress, including stress-induced ulcers, and helps the immune system generate protective white blood cells that are often depleted by constant stress. Ashwagandha can help you resist the damaging effects of stress and be revitalized and recharged. So again, like the other adaptogenic herbs, it truly keeps your body and mind in shape. I consider it to be one of the most important adaptogens.

Native to China, schisandra (Schisandra chinensis) is a woody vine that bears clusters of tiny, bright red berries. Interestingly, the berries are called “Wu Wei Zi” in Chinese, which translates to “five-flavor fruit,” based on their salty, sweet, sour, pungent, and bitter flavors. Schisandra has been used traditionally for millennia to slow the aging process, improve concentration, fight fatigue, and enhance immune function.

As an adaptogen, schisandra is a potent general tonic, decreasing fatigue, enhancing physical performance, and promoting endurance, so it’s perfect to help you exercise your stress away. While the mechanism of action is not completely understood, beneficial compounds called lignans found in the seeds of the berry may be responsible. Schisandra counters stress by reducing the levels of stress hormones in the blood. And, it has strong anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.

Several human clinical studies show that schisandra also improves concentration, coordination and endurance. Much like rhodiola, schisandra helps to prevent mental fatigue and increases accuracy and quality of work. In various human clinical studies with people who definitely need to be able to function under stress and lack of sleep, including soldiers, doctors, students, and other groups, schisandra demonstrated superior benefits and helped keep everyone focused.

One thing I would add about schisandra, is that when you choose a formula, look for one that contains schisandra standardized for one type of lignan in particular – schizandrin. It’ll help you get the optimal potency and benefits from the herb.

You Can Manage Stress

You are stronger than you realize. You are in the driver’s seat and you CAN manage chronic stress. First, you must identify and decrease as much of the “unnecessaries” and use that time to become centered and focused. While you are whittling away at this, consider a natural, safe, and effective combination of eleuhtero and other adaptogenic herbs that give you the support you need with none of the baggage that you don’t.

Dr. Holly recommends a product with these ingredients.

Proprietary Complex 750 mg
Rhodiola (Rhodiola rosea) Root Extract standardized to contain >5% rosavins (rosavins and salidrosides), Eleuthero (Eleutherococcus senticosus) Root Extract standardized to contain >0.8% eleutherosides, Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera) Root Extract standardized to contain 2.5% withanolides, Schisandra (Schisandra chinensis) Fruit and Seed Extract standardized to contain >9% schisandrins

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