

Stealth fighters

Stressed? Exhausted? Lacking stamina? There's a herb for that, and it's called an adaptogen. Naturopath Toni Green reports.



ADAPTOGENS are herbs that increase the body's ability to adapt to stressors, like heat, cold, noise, high altitudes or hectic schedules, and improve your mental clarity and physical energy, strength, and endurance.

Rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*)

This contains phytochemicals that suppress production of cortisol and increase levels of stress-resistant proteins, thus helping to counter both anxiety and signs of ageing. Its fatigue-fighting properties made it a favourite of Russian cosmonauts, athletes and military personnel. Studies show that it lowers physical and mental fatigue, protects against radiation and exposure to toxic chemicals, and increases student performance by improving memory and also extending the length of time material studied is remembered. Plus, Chinese research shows rhodiola strengthens the cardiovascular system, lowers blood pressure, and improves blood flow to the brain, so reducing the risk of stroke.

Siberian ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*)

Variously used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for fatigue, insomnia, joint pain, and muscle spasms, this has antioxidant and antidepressant effects, and also lowers blood pressure and blood glucose levels. In the Western herbal tradition, it is classified as an adaptogen and used to boost immunity and energy, especially for convalescing after illness. Russian studies reveal it also stimulates immunity in people with cancer, and reduces levels of LDL ('bad') cholesterol and triglycerides.

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)

A staple in Ayurvedic medicine for over 2,500

years, this boosts immunity, lowers levels of the stress hormone cortisol, counters anxiety and nervous exhaustion, and improves energy and stamina. It is of particular interest as a treatment for high blood pressure, for impotence associated with anxiety, and for chronic fatigue, because it also supports and enhances thyroid and adrenal function. Note: Ashwagandha should not be used by pregnant or breastfeeding mothers.

Schizandra (*Schizandra chinensis*)

In TCM, these berries are considered to be a balancing tonic and they are used widely to treat fatigue and improve physical and mental performance and endurance. Schizandra reduces blood levels of cortisol and is an effective liver tonic, stimulating production of glutathione which is the body's most powerful detoxifier; it is helpful for cancer patients, as it is cytotoxic to tumour cells while improving immune function.

Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*)

Known as holy basil in Ayurvedic medicine, this adaptogen has long been used as a rejuvenative to improve memory, energy, and endurance. Studies demonstrate that it helps the body function optimally while under stress, without altering mood or mental capacity, and also slows production of corticosterone, a hormone linked to age-related mental disorders, confusion, and poor memory. Another interesting finding is that tulsi reduces the hyper-allergic response in asthma and allergies, while simultaneously boosting immune function. ✨

❁ D-I-Y with Toni: Tonic tea

Combine equal parts of dried crumbled tulsi leaves and schizandra berries. Store in a glass container away from light. Place one teaspoon of blend for every cup of boiling water in a non-metal container, and steep for 2-3 minutes with the lid on. Strain before drinking, adding honey if you wish.

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