

# ADAPTOGENS FOR OPTIMAL HORMONE BALANCE

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In the biohacking sphere, adaptogens have become go-to support substances for our overworked adrenal glands, which regulate the body's stress response by producing hormones like cortisol. Too much cortisol ages your endocrine system (and your skin!) and negatively affects your biological systems, sex drive, and menstrual and reproductive health.

Adaptogens help the body fight stress by adapting to what your body needs. (Hence the name adaptogens.) For example, sometimes when the body has been overproducing cortisol for too long, the adrenals stop making enough cortisol to get us through each day and we need our adrenal system to re-engage and produce more cortisol. Alternatively, if we're overproducing cortisol but we haven't hit a point (yet) where our adrenals have conked out, we need our stress system to slow down a bit and produce less cortisol. The magic of adaptogens is that they can sense what we need and help provide it. They are like the "smart devices" of the plant world.

When these ancient herbs pitch in and help regulate our physiology, our bodies can focus on producing optimal levels of estrogen, progesterone, testosterone and other important hormones. With better hormonal balance, your entire endocrine system will operate more efficiently, which will have a positive impact on your periods, fertility, and sex drive and will help prevent premature aging.

# WHAT WOMEN NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ADAPTOGENS

Some adaptogens are phytoestrogenic, which means they mimic natural estrogen in the body. Other adaptogens boost testosterone levels. This is important knowledge for women who are struggling with hormonal conditions, such as fibroids, endometriosis, cysts, or PCOS. If you have one of these conditions, be sure to take adaptogens only for a short period when you're under a lot of stress, and don't overdo it by trying all of them at once. I recommend experimenting with them one at a time to see which ones work best for you.

Another key point about adaptogens? They can be an excellent short-term intervention when your life goes through a crazy hectic period, but if you're suffering from chronic stress that has you running on empty, it's better for you to do some deeper healing before reaching for adaptogens. These herbs are powerful, but they can only do so much if you don't address the deeper causes of your stress. If you're not getting sufficient, high-quality sleep, for example, or if you are not eating healthy whole foods in a phase-based pattern, you will not get the full benefit from adaptogens. If your stress is systemic and persistent, start by engaging in self-care that nurtures your female biochemistry and replenishes your energy reserves. Start by using The Cycle Syncing Method™ to align your food, exercise, and scheduling with your 28-day hormone cycle. After you begin that practice, you can reach for adaptogens.



## **Here's are some of the key adaptogens and how they influence your hormones:**

### **Maca**

Maca is a Peruvian plant that is part of the brassica family—think Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and cauliflower. As a supplement, maca comes in a powdered form, as a capsule, or as a liquid extract.

**Is it for you?** I recommend maca powder as part of a complete cycle syncing program for women at four specific life stages:

- when you stop taking synthetic birth control
- if you're age thirty-five or over and experiencing symptoms of perimenopause
- if you're postmenopausal and experiencing symptoms
- if you've had a baby and have stopped breastfeeding

In these four situations, maca may help with PMS symptoms, low energy levels, low sex drive, brain fog, poor focus, trouble concentrating, mood swings, and depression.

### **Ashwagandha**

This plant has been used for 3,000 years for its therapeutic potential. Scientific research confirms that this medicinal plant has many benefits, including reducing stress, boosting energy, enhancing sexual function, and lowering blood sugar. In a 2012 study in the Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine, participants taking ashwagandha showed improved stress resistance and reported a better quality of life.

In the sex department, women who took ashwagandha reported significant improvements in sexual function, including heightened arousal, lubrication, orgasm, and satisfaction in a 2015 study in BioMed Research International. This could be related to the way this adaptogen supports healthy testosterone production. What many people are excited about is that animal studies have shown that ashwagandha may have anti-cancer properties. For example, a trial in Anticancer Research suggests this herb can dramatically slow cell division in some types of breast cancer.

**Is it for you?** If you're struggling with stress and anxiety, or if you're wrestling with low libido, you may want to try taking ashwagandha.

### **Holy Basil**

This herb, which is native to Southeast Asia, is well-known for its anti-stress properties and for blood sugar control, both of which promote healthy hormonal balance. Holy basil may also improve hormonal health due to its role in supporting liver function, which was highlighted in the journal Ayurvedic in 2015. The liver is involved in flushing excess hormones from the body, so a healthy liver helps prevent estrogen dominance. (Excess estrogen is associated with many common period problems.)

**Is it for you?** If you're struggling with stress and anxiety, if your blood sugar isn't stabilized, or if you have a history of taking over-the-counter or prescription medications, you may want to consider taking holy basil for liver and detox support.

### **Reishi mushroom**

Reishi is a powerful adaptogen native to Asia that is commonly used in Eastern medicine. Scientific evidence shows these mushrooms, which are packed with antioxidants and are available as a powder or supplement, have anti-cancer, anti-aging, and antidepressant properties while boosting the immune system. These are all great benefits, but I'm most interested in its effects as an anti-androgenic, which means it has the potential to reduce the levels of male hormones, including testosterone and androsterone. Research in the International Journal of Endocrinology & Metabolism explored this effect and showed that reishi may help ease symptoms of PCOS, hirsutism, and acne.

**Is it for you?** If you're struggling with any symptoms related to PCOS, which is associated with higher testosterone levels, taking reishi supplements may provide some benefit

### **Cordyceps**

This mushroom has been studied for its ability to lower blood glucose levels, with research suggesting that it may help control diabetes. It's also known for its ability to boost stamina and support athletic performance. Like many of the other adaptogens, it is anti-inflammatory, anti-tumor, and may have anti-aging benefits.

**Is it for you?** If you struggle to keep your blood sugar balanced, cordyceps is an excellent choice as an herbal support.

### **Chaga mushroom**

Chaga is high in iron and a host of other minerals and vitamins. Like other adaptogens, chaga is filled with antioxidants, helps protect against cancer, supports a strong immune system, and keeps blood sugar stable.

**Is it for you?** I recommend chaga if you are iron deficient or have a heavy flow each month.

## **Rhodiola**

Rhodiola has several actions: it helps boost energy, support the immune system, and keep blood sugar stable. But it is best known for its ability to help reduce anxiety. A study commissioned by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health found that rhodiola was similar to the antidepressant drug sertraline in relieving symptoms of depression, but those who took rhodiola had fewer side effects than those who took sertraline.

*Is it for you?* I recommend rhodiola if you struggle with stress, anxiety, or low mood.

## **Schisandra**

Studies have shown that schisandra can help reduce levels of cortisol and help stabilize blood sugar. This herb also has anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties and may help protect the liver, which is one of the most important organs in helping the body detox from excess estrogen. Schisandra helps reduce anxiety while boosting mental clarity and focus. It is used to help improve athletic performance and build up stamina in general. Bonus! Studies suggest that schisandra may help protect against accelerated skin aging.

*Is it for you?* I recommend schisandra if you have flagging energy and/or trouble staying focused.

## **Chasteberry/Vitex**

While not technically an adaptogen, Vitex is a powerful herb for many women with hormone imbalances and is worth mentioning. Vitex supports the production of progesterone and luteinizing hormone – both of which are necessary for your body to ovulate, for regular menstrual cycles, and to help reduce or erase the symptoms of hormone imbalance, including bloating, acne, breast tenderness and even help with food cravings. (Vitex has also been shown to help with symptoms of menopause, like insomnia and hot flashes.) Vitex can also help correct a luteal phase defect. Vitex is well-researched as a support for female fertility

## ADAPTOGEN QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

|                     | TAKE FOR:  | BONUS  |
|---------------------|--|--|
| MACA                | Perimenopause symptoms, postmenopause symptoms, quitting the Pill, postpartum (but only once you've stopped breastfeeding) | May help with brain fog, low energy, mood swings, and low mood                 |
| ASHWAGANDHA         | Stress, anxiety, low libido  | Anti-cancer properties   |
| HOLY BASIL          | Stress, anxiety, imbalanced blood sugar, history of taking NSAIDs or other over-the-counter medicine                       | May help with sleep problems, improve cholesterol profile, and ease joint pain |
| REISHI MUSHROOM     | PCOS, imbalanced blood sugar   | Antioxidant and anti-cancer  |
| CORDYCEPS           | PCOS, imbalanced blood sugar   | May help improve energy and stamina  |
| RHODIOLA            | Stress, anxiety, low mood  | Immune support and blood sugar balance   |
| SCHISANDRA          | Anxiety, low energy, inability to focus  | May help with accelerated skin aging   |
| CHASTEBERRY (VITEX) | Quitting the pill, Phase 2 perimenopause, when trying to get pregnant, when you want to breastfeed                         | May help menopause symptoms  |

## ADAPTOGENS FOR EACH PHASE OF YOUR 28-DAY CYCLE

NOTE: ADAPTOGENS WORK BEST WHEN TAKEN FOR LONGER PERIODS OF TIME, HOWEVER, THIS IS A WAY YOU COULD USE THEM ON A SHORTER TERM BASIS TO HELP WITH THE UNIQUE ASPECTS OF EACH CYCLE PHASE.

| PHASE            | HERB(S)  |
|------------------|--|
| FOLLICULAR PHASE | Schisandra (for energy support)  |
| OVULATION        | Holy Basil (for estrogen metabolism)   |
| LUTEAL PHASE     | Ashwagandha or rhodiola (to address elevated cortisol during this phase); cordyceps (for balanced blood sugar) |
| MENSTRUATION     | Red raspberry leaf, nettle, chaga mushroom (to replenish minerals, iron)                                       |



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