



These supplements act as your push-through-it wingman

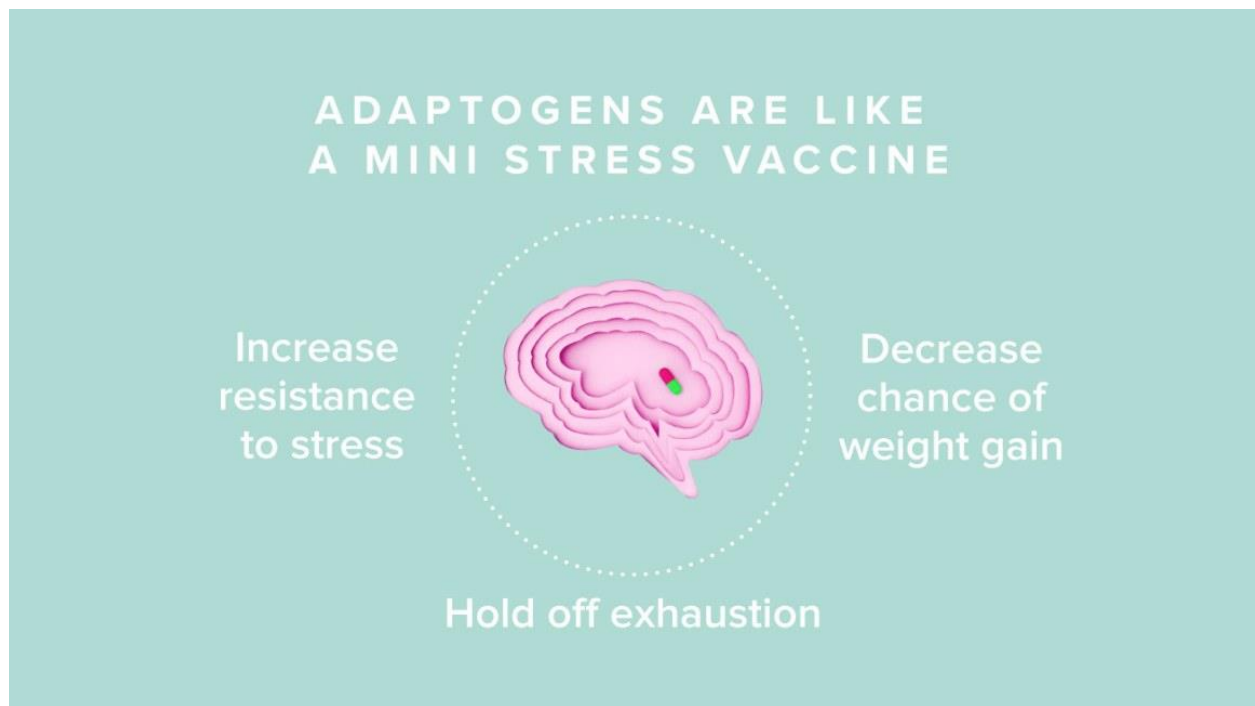
Deadlines are having a party on your calendar, your bestie is having a meltdown, your car is in the shop, and, oh, you're out of toilet paper. Meanwhile your heart's racing and you can't concentrate. Hello, stress! Before you reach for a comfort cronut or guzzle that fourth latte, there's another way to cope with the pressure — adaptogens.

Adaptogens can help your body adapt to life's doozies. These herbs aid our bodies in reacting to or recovering from both short- and long-term physical or mental stress. Some also boost immunity and overall well-being. [Research shows](#) adaptogens can combat fatigue, enhance mental performance, ease depression and anxiety, and help you thrive rather than just muddle through.

So whether you're training for a marathon, enduring a marathon study session, or even just sprinting through a stressful midday meeting, adaptogens may be key.

“As women living modern lives, we are going to have plenty of stress,” says Leslie Korn, PhD, “but if our body and mind has a biological boost, like adaptogens, in order to cope better with this stress, then we will be less likely to get sick.” Korn is a Harvard Medical School-trained traumatologist who uses integrative approaches to treating the mind and body. She says adaptogens enhance our ability to come into balance.

How do adaptogens hack your stress?



This is how adaptogens work:

When we face a stressor, whether physical or mental, our bodies go through what's called [general adaptation syndrome \(GAS\)](#). GAS is a three-stage response: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. Adaptogens help us stay in the

resistance phase longer, via a stimulating effect that holds off the exhaustion. Instead of crashing in the midst of a stressful moment, task, or event, we attain equilibrium and can soldier on.

“Like a mini vaccine, some adaptogens appear to inoculate us to stress and help us cope,” Korn says.


When we can adapt to stress, we perform better and feel better despite what’s stressing us out. And with that, we can also improve our health and well-being. When you’re stressed, your adrenal gland releases the stress hormone [cortisol](#), which then energizes you to tackle an emergency. But too much too often is usually bad for our bodies.

“Cortisol is often the culprit for weight gain, especially around the belly area,” says Tara Nayak, a naturopathic physician in Philadelphia who recommends adaptogens to her clients. “When you reduce stress with adaptogens, you reduce stress hormones and hence their effect on weight gain.”

Adaptogens have the potential to help indirectly with other health issues, like pain, digestive concerns, insomnia, and more. “Stress sets off a cascade of physical responses that affect immune function, our hormones, our cognitive function system, and our internal clock, called our [circadian rhythm](#),” Korn says. “If these stressors persist, this leads to chronic illness.”


Here's how to ace adaptogens

HOW TO TAKE ADAPTOGENS




1

Find a creative way to incorporate it into your routine.



2

Rotate type of adaptogen every six weeks.



3

Follow product instructions — don't overdose!

Each adaptogen has a different effect on the body, so the choice of which one to take will depend on the result you seek. For example, if you're both frazzled and fried, [ashwagandha](#) might be the ticket to both energize and relax you.

Adaptogen	Potential benefit
American ginseng (<i>Panax quinquefolius</i>)	Boosts working memory, reaction time, calmness, and immune system
Ashwagandha (<i>Withania somnifera</i>)	Reduces stress and anxiety
Astragalus (<i>Astragalus membranaceus</i>)	Combats fatigue <small>Trusted Source</small>
Cordyceps (<i>Cordyceps militaris</i>)	Boosts stamina
Goji berry (<i>Lycium barbarum</i>)	Boosts energy, physical and mental performance, calmness, and sense of well-being, and can also improve sleep

Eluethero root (<i>Eleutherococcus senticosus</i>)	Improves focus and staves off mental fatigue
Jiaogulan (<i>Gynostemma Pentaphyllum</i>)	Reduces stress and boosts endurance
Licorice root (<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>)	Reduces stress
Rhodiola rosea (<i>R. rosea</i>)	Staves off physical and mental fatigue
Schisandra berry/Magnolia berry (<i>Schisandra chinensis</i>)	Boosts endurance, mental performance, and working capacity
Tulsi/Holy basil (<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>)	Reduces physical and mental stress, stress-related anxiety, and depression
Turmeric (<i>Curcuma longa</i>)	Boosts brain function and reduces depression

Follow dosing instructions carefully

For dosing, follow instructions that come with product information. A naturopathic physician can recommend specific adaptogens and reputable formulas or tinctures. Plus, an ND can adjust your dosage up or down as needed based on the effects you hope to achieve. “They are generally safe,” Korn says of adaptogens, “but each individual may react differently, so start slowly and observe your own reactions.”

Get creative to get excited

Find a method that’s fun and convenient to incorporate into your routine. You can take adaptogens as herbal supplements in capsule form, added to smoothies as powders, or concocted into teas or soups.

Korn likes to make a stimulating tea that can be consumed hot or cold. It’s one part [licorice root](#), one part fennel seed, one part fenugreek seed, and two parts flax seed. She simmers a tablespoon of the mixture in 2 cups of water

for 15 minutes. She has other recipes, like a “fruity turmeric smoothie” in her book.

Nayak enjoys experimenting with adaptogenic foods. She uses the dried root [astragalus](#) [Trusted Source](#) in soups or stews. “It’s a great immune supportive adaptogen that gives an earthy flavor,” she says. “[Schisandra](#) is also a fabulous herb for cooking because of its complex flavor. It’s great in a berry compote or a chai spice tea.”

Time your adaptogens right

Both Nayak and Korn suggest taking stimulating adaptogens, like [rhodiola](#), earlier in the day, before 3 pm, to align with the body’s natural rhythms. “We are designed to be live wires in the morning and to rest by early evening,” Korn says. It should be noted that the study on the effects of *Rhodiola rosea* produced inconclusive evidence of its efficacy and further studies are needed in the future.

Calming adaptogens, like [holy basil](#), can be taken both in the daytime and before bed, however. They aren’t strong enough to have a sedative effect.

You can use adaptogens for a few days or weeks to get through a busy time at work. Or take them for a stretch of chronic chaos, when life just keeps handing it to you. Korn recommends rotating the type of adaptogen you’re using after six weeks, though, so that your body can benefit from the subtle differences among herbs.

Remember that adaptogens aren’t a cure-all or a substitute

Don’t rely on adaptogens for logging pillow time or taking good care of yourself. Use them to cope with intense periods — like holidays, finals, and taxes — and to stay gently energized long term. “I definitely love my adaptogens!” Nayak says. “I don’t feel the same without them. In fact, I would

say that I didn't realize how much stress I was holding onto until I was helped back into balance."

As with any drug or supplement, adaptogens do have side effects, interactions, and contraindications. So do your research, especially regarding any current health conditions. It's also recommended you contact your healthcare provider before beginning a herbal regiment.