



Adapto- WHAT?

Story | ANGELA AMBROSE

If you're feeling stressed out or depleted, plant adaptogens can help strengthen your endocrine system and restore overall balance to your body.

"At the most basic level, an adaptogen is an herb that helps the body adapt to a wide variety of stressors, be it psychological, physiological, noise, temperature," says David Winston, RH (AHG), herbalist and author of *Adaptogens: Herbs for Strength, Stamina and Stress Relief*. "You can't get anything from the pharmacy that does this unless you're buying an adaptogen because, within orthodox medicine, there's nothing that does this."

Unlike pharmaceutical drugs that target specific ailments, adaptogens produce a non-specific response to physical and mental stress and normalize the overall physiology in the body. Although adaptogens, such as ginseng and ashwagandha, have been used successfully for thousands of years in Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine, modern research of adaptogens began in the late 1940s.

These healing herbs work by

re-regulating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, the master control system for endocrine function, the nervous system and immune function. Recent research suggests that adaptogens may also combat stress on a cellular level. Only about a dozen herbs have been officially classified as adaptogens; however, due to limited clinical studies, many are still being evaluated as possible adaptogens.

"Adaptogens are not a one-size-fits-all," Winston says. Some adaptogens are stimulating and warming, such as red Asian ginseng, while others, like ashwagandha, have a calming effect. If you're unsure which adaptogen is best for you, consult an herbalist or a naturopathic physician. You can search for a clinical herbalist in your area on americanherbalistsguild.com. Before taking adaptogens, talk to your doctor about potential interactions with any drugs you are currently taking. ✦

EASY-TO-FIND ADAPTOGENS

Although adaptogens can be used by anyone at any age, below are a few of Winston's general recommendations. Look for these powerful herbs at your local health food grocery store.

ADAPTOGEN	EFFECTS ON THE BODY	COMMON USES	SUGGESTED AGE GROUP
American Ginseng	Mildly stimulating, slightly warming and moistening	For those who feel a little fatigued and catch colds easily.	45 to 60
White Ginseng	Most stimulating of the adaptogens, warming	For those with very depleted energy and who feel cold most of the time.	55 to 70
Red Ginseng	Moderately stimulating and moistening	For those who are especially deficient.	70 and older
Ashwagandha	Calming, slightly warming	For those who feel anxious or are suffering from stress-induced insomnia or muscle pain.	not applicable
Eleuthero	Energetically neutral	For those who are stressed out, low on sleep and nutrition, and working long hours.	Teens and 20s to 30s
Rhodiola	Stimulating, cooling and drying	For those in a depressed mental state, fatigued or feeling unfocused.	20s to 40s
Schisandra	Calming, warming and drying	Dual effect on nervous system: calming but increases focus and concentration. Also helps relieve anxiety and stress-induced asthma due to its anti-inflammatory properties.	not applicable