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## Exercising Appropriately For Your Hormones

You're watching Food as Medicine TV, where we help you heal from the root cause. And we're talking about exercising today appropriately for your hormones and cortisol levels, because this is a question that comes in all the time from our Adrenal ReCoders and it's been starting to come in more often from our tribe as well. So here [00:00:30] we are. We're going to talk about how exercise, we all know, I think it's an inarguable fact that exercise is an important factor for our health. But let's talk about what exercise is appropriate for your hormones now, based upon where you are.

Simply put, it's a form of good stress and it naturally stimulates the release of the catabolic hormone known as cortisol. So catabolic means breaking down. Cortisol is naturally secreted [00:01:00] during the day. It peaks in the morning, it's supposed to, when we wake up and then naturally declines as the day goes on.

High levels of cortisol, high chronic levels of cortisol can kickstart widespread inflammation in the body and then lower immunity. It does that by lowering our white blood cells, which are our body's defense system. So while we are huge fans of exercise and we think it is a wonderful way to relieve stress and to remain healthy, there's certain [00:01:30] forms of exercise which can increase our stress hormones and then give us actually unwanted effects on the body if we're in this chronic stress state, if life is already taking a lot from us.

So this is why we often see women who come to us, they've been on the treadmill for an hour or more every single day and they say, "I can't lose weight, I don't get it." The reason is often due to the cortisol enhancing effects of cardio exercise. So I just really [00:02:00] want to clarify this further, because for some cardio can be a great form of stress relief and it can be a very healthy form of exercise. Then for others who have a very delicate hormonal system, this can be detrimental to their health, to their nervous system and their stress levels. Science accepts, it's no longer a mystery, science now accepts that our body stores emotions, therefore moving our physical bodies is a given. It's a great way to release trauma and stress as well as to stop our bodies from living off [00:02:30] of stress hormones as our energy.

However, if you're struggling with hormonal imbalances, especially the concept of poor functioning adrenals and thyroid hypothyroidism, over-exercise can leave you feeling more exhausted, shaky, and wreak havoc also on your sex hormones as a result. Exercise even mild for some people can deplete our bodies and deplete our metabolic reserve, which is basically our energy storage system. When we continue to [00:03:00] exercise and we fight those symptoms of extreme fatigue or weakness or shakiness, our body is going to respond, our energy storage part of our body responds with muscle wasting, wasting weakened

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immunity, and these exacerbated symptoms of hormonal imbalance because we've inadvertently driven up our stress hormones.

So we have to talk about what is the right form, what's a balanced form of exercise? What's an imbalanced form of exercise based upon where [00:03:30] our hormones are? So for some of us who are really stressed, this can mean kind of minimal movement, which includes restorative exercises such as deep breathing, yin yoga, very gentle yoga. Very gentle Pilates, foam rolling, which we're going to talk about, and light walking. If you are in a really stressed state and you have been for awhile, you're going to be totally fine with some very light resistance training and yoga flow.

It's all [00:04:00] individually dependent based upon our own biochemistry and hormonal reserves, meaning we should not all be doing the crazy intense workouts for long periods of time or even the short burst of high intensity interval training to achieve such things such as weight loss. This is really coming now from working with hundreds of people in our adrenal recode program, we often get asked, "How is exercise affecting my thyroid and my adrenals and how do I know how to exercise appropriately so I can contribute [00:04:30] to my healing process, instead of having to spend the whole day recovering from the exercise that's supposed to be good for me.

Our response is to ask you to tune into yourself to see how it makes you feel. The right type of movement should energize you and make you feel refreshed afterwards. Movement is an essential piece of healing. We all need to do it. The key is to find the right movement to meet where your body is currently in your healing process. So if you're someone that has consistently low [00:05:00] body temperature impulses, aka low thyroid and adrenal function, then your body is already sensing that you are running for your life 24/7, even if you're completely exhausted and it needs to be supported, not pushed harder. If you push yourself to the point of exhaustion, you're compromising your thyroid. So the best thing to do when healing is to let breath be your guide.

Let your breathing dictate the intensity and only breathe through your nose. So if you have to breathe [00:05:30] through your mouth, then you're working out too hard. So this type of nose breathing only when you exercise is going to ensure that you're meeting your body's needs and you're not exceeding your energy thresholds and that your cells are in fact receiving the oxygen that they need. If you start to breathe out of your mouth and you're exercising too hard for your current level, that is the easiest way to exercise appropriately for your cortisol levels.

I'm going to you just a couple of simple things to think about when you're working [00:06:00] to find the balance between healing and movement. Number one, like we just talked about, let breath dictate movement. Do any movement at an intensity that you can maintain nose

breathing, and then you know what? Take your temperature and pulse 30 minutes after this exercise to determine whether or not your workout is supporting you or breaking you down.

If your pulse skyrockets, then the exercise was too intense. If your temperature drops, then you have [00:06:30] to re-evaluate your pre and post-exercise nutrition. You want to make sure you have a solid nutritional foundation that supports your physiology so you're able to meet the needs of the added demands that exercise puts on your system. Always having meals, small meals, 60 minutes prior to working out. Make sure that it's light, easy to digest, metabolic, make sure that it has carbs, protein and fat. This could be a cassava tortilla with a quarter of an avocado [00:07:00] and a Turkey slice. Something simple. Also have a little protein shake afterwards that also has some protein and fat.

Our favorite recommended movements while you're healing your nervous system, if you are struggling with insomnia, exhaustion, and low energy and these kinds of hormonal imbalances, get your buns to yoga. Yoga is an excellent way to stimulate the mind-body connection, help you tune into yourself and use your breath [00:07:30] for increased cellular energy and healing and to train the body to stop over producing cortisol. It's truly your best physical tool to recode your hormones, because it sends the message to the body that it's safe and that it can relax. Doing a gentle form of yoga. There's a lot of different kinds of yoga out there. I'm not talking about the bootcamp super hot yoga. I'm talking about a gentle yoga flow where you're really opening up the body and releasing stress. By doing this three [00:08:00] times a week, it can help train your system to live mostly in your parasympathetic nervous system, your rest, digest and heal. And to only use the sympathetic or fight or flight when true danger is present.

Even just stretching in the morning, just focus on a release. Start by releasing your neck and shoulders and then do just some simple twists to ring out your spine. And just these simple twists are going to generate new fresh blood flow while you're lengthening your spine. [00:08:30] Just those simple twists are going to help your cerebral spinal fluid. The fluid that flows in between your brain and your spine. Help it flow more easily so it can completely nourish your nerves. Gentle yoga is also targeted to support the thyroid and it places special emphasis on releasing the hips and the psoas muscle. We're all sitting too much. These muscles get tight when constant stress is present and they remain tight after stress passes. So [00:09:00] just by the act of sitting and these muscles being tight, they cause a shortness of breath, they cause shallow breathing and basically, we stay stuck, because the hip flexors and the psoas are essentially the junk drawers for emotional storage and they need to be emptied once in a while.

We recommend doing this three times a week. But if that sounds to be too much start once or twice a week. Something you may not know about me is I [00:09:30] am a certified yoga instructor and in my twenties a long time ago, I taught yoga for about four years and I would constantly hear women who wanted to lose weight and they'd say, "Oh, I really should go to a

kickboxing class. I really should go work out at the gym. And they would view yoga as kind of a waste, because they didn't think it's going to contribute to their long-term goals. So I'd have to explain because it balances the stress hormones, it does allow them to lose weight. It's actually going to help them lose weight [00:10:00] and actually enjoy the process of it, versus destroying themselves in the gym for an hour or more, doing something really intense. Just something I want to plant the seed for you to think about.

Foam rolling. This is a foam roller. There are many different kinds of foam rollers. Myofascial release is something that is a technique and we use it in our adrenal recode program. You basically have the application of pressure using [00:10:30] one of these foam rollers to scar tissue and soft tissue adhesion, and it works by freeing up your fascia, which is the connective tissue that's basically woven around each and every muscle, bone, nerve artery and vein in our bodies as well as our internal organs, including our heart, lungs, brain and spinal cord. Evidence suggests that the fascia can be damaged by both physical and mental impact, and recent studies and [00:11:00] scientific research, they back up, they show a direct correlation between the fascia and our health and wellbeing.

Because our nerve endings, they run through our fascia. So when the fascist damaged, a block is created, it's kind of like a dam in a river and the energy is no longer able to flow freely. There's a 16th Century physician, his name is Paracelsus. He said, "There is but one disease and its name is congestion." So [00:11:30] foam rolling, you can look up a video on foam rolling, the simple act of doing this is going to release and disperse stored up physical and mental congestion so your body can process and eliminate it physically but also emotionally, like where it's all inextricably connected.

A lot of people feel the results of foam rolling, it leaves them with this all around feeling of wellness and I can attest to that. Almost like when you feel like you've left a cathartic session [00:12:00] with a therapist, you want to be mindful when you're actually doing it about where your tender points are and you want to work through those. When you get to a tender point, you just kind of want to pause and use your breath and be gentle with it until you feel a release versus muscling through it. You could simply start with foam rolling or you can add it into your yoga routine as well. We typically recommend aiming to do 20 minutes a day of foam rolling at least several times a week if you want the [00:12:30] benefits to start stacking up.

We're huge fans of walking. Walking is one of the most underutilized things you can do for your health. We love walking to improve circulation, strengthen muscles, improve sleep, by increasing certain neurotransmitters and decreasing stress hormones like cortisol. Just 30 minutes of walking a day, which we can all do, it's been shown to reduce fasting blood sugar levels in those with diabetes. It's a low [00:13:00] stress activity and it can be great for those with adrenal dysregulation and thyroid issues when you don't have that much energy and

when your body's drained and fatigued, a 15 minute walk is a great form of exercise to actually shift that feeling and get the circulation going again.

Grab a friend, enjoy your time in nature. Walking with nature's going to give you increased energy as it is, and allow you to be more grounded and enjoy a better sense of wellbeing. Okay? [00:13:30] Can you do that? Can we all do that? We can all start with at least a 15 minute walk, work up to 30 minutes and our exercise capacity increases as we heal, as we take our temperatures, we take our pulse. If we want to train for these marathons or triathlons, you've got to work up to whatever it is you're looking to do physically with your body.

Time of day. Exercise is important, what time of day you exercise. So along with the type, it's important to look at the timing of it all. [00:14:00] So I mentioned that cortisol naturally peaks first thing in the morning and then slowly declines throughout the day. Which makes the best time to exercise in the morning or mid-morning because it will not have the same effect on your cortisol levels than say exercising a late afternoon or evening. If you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, then I don't recommend exercising at night because this can be driving up your cortisol levels and then inhibiting a normal sleep-wake cycle.

I hope that this show has helped you understand [00:14:30] how exercise specifically impacts our adrenals, thyroid, brain, and nervous system. Really because of the fast pace of modern society, many of us are dealing with issues with these four systems, whereas we never were before. That's the current trend that we're seeing, is how important it is to use exercise appropriately and in tandem with its effect on cortisol, in order to find your individual sweet spot.

Questions, [00:15:00] comments, concerns, let us know. Leave a comment. Thank you so much for watching and we'll catch you next time on Food As Medicine TV.