

Exploring Adrenal Fatigue: A conversation with

Dr. James Wilson, DC, ND, PhD

By Katherine Smith, Editor



Dr. James Wilson is one of the world's best known natural medicine practitioners, thanks to his book, *Adrenal Fatigue: The 21st Century Stress Syndrome*, which has sold over half a million copies, and the line of dietary supplements he formulated for stress. In February 2018, Dr. Wilson and I talked at length on the phone about illness, health and healing.

Unlike many bright children who have (or perhaps are inculcated with) the desire to become a doctor from an early age, the young James Wilson's interest in natural medicine didn't develop until his early twenties when some personal experiences helped him understand how powerful natural medicines can be. He was initially influenced by the depth of eastern medicine.

"I was fortunate to meet and learn from some of the trailblazers of modern holistic medicine, like Noburu Muramoto, who later wrote a book called *Healing Ourselves*, and Michio Kuchi, who brought the practice of macrobiotics to the West (via George Osawa)."

In 1974 Dr. Wilson began to train as a chiropractor. After the four years of intensive study, he reported:

"Although my training was excellent, I didn't feel I knew enough." So he began another four years of study to earn his Doctorate of Naturopathy.

While running his clinic, he joined together with a small group of other health professionals to become the founders of the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine (CCNM) in Toronto, now one of the largest naturopathic colleges in the world. After completing his degree as a member of CCNM's first graduating class, Dr. Wilson's quest for knowledge continued.

He subsequently earned a master's of science degree in nutrition and biosciences at the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut. This was followed by a PhD with research in cellular immunology and human nutrition at the University of Arizona

His interest in adrenal fatigue began when he was in practice as a naturopath and chiropractor in a rural community about 100 kilometres north of Toronto, Canada.

"I had a female patient with postpartum depression who had just given birth but was not improving after two weeks in the hospital and was not responding to antidepressants." The

new mother told Dr. Wilson:

"I know this sounds awful but I don't love my husband; I don't love my children or my new born. All I want to do is die."

Dr. Wilson's friend and mentor, Dr. Leo Roy, suggested her adrenal glands could be a factor. After researching the effects of low adrenal function on hormone balance, he decided to build up the new mother's adrenals with adrenal gland concentrates.

In the meantime he was also able to put his training in psychology to good use at each of this woman's weekly appointments:

"I kept making weekly contracts with her not to kill herself for another week. At the end of three weeks...she had a tiny smile. It was then I knew she was on the road to recovery."

As it turned out, treating this patient was not only of benefit to her and her family, but led to helping many other people as well:

"After my experience with that patient, I realized that the HPA (hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal) axis was essential to not only proper adrenal function but to overall health and a sense of wellbeing. I became aware I had a number of other patients with low adrenal function. So I developed individual treatments for each of them. Although most of the time felt like I didn't know what I was doing, I must have since they kept getting better. The real difference in the effectiveness of my therapies was because I combined multiple glandular concentrates with specific nutrients and herbs. Although they were difficult to find, I did my best to find hormone-free glandulars because I got better results with them."

"The adrenals are the primary glands to respond to protect us from stress but the first glands to deteriorate under chronic stress. Although the hypothalamus can be damaged by very extreme trauma, like early childhood abuse or war zone experiences, in most circumstances it's the adrenals that must be supported for healing to take place from stressful lifestyles and events."

"Adrenal fatigue is very common and occurs when the total demand of stress on the body is greater than the capacity of the adrenals to secrete hormones that compensate for the stress. The adrenals do not actually fatigue like a muscle fatigues but they decrease in their capacity to secrete the proper amount of hormones needed to compensate for the stress the body is under. When I coined the term 'adrenal fatigue' in 1998, it was never intended to be a scientific term; however, it has started to appear in the scientific literature."

There are many signs and symptoms of adrenal fatigue, and they vary to some degree, from person to person. The most common symptoms include:

- Early morning fatigue – even after a full night's sleep
- Difficulty getting going in the morning
- Tired for "no reason"
- Need caffeine to get going and keep going all day

- Feeling run down and stressed
- Crave salty or sweet snacks
- Struggle to keep up with life's daily demands
- Can't bounce back from stress or illness
- Not having fun anymore
- Decreased sex drive

"Most chronic illnesses involve some level of adrenal fatigue. This is because all chronic illness is stressful on the body, the psyche and the emotions. Chronic illness often causes financial strain, another significant stress. Even in many acute illnesses, adrenal fatigue plays a small to dominant role in the symptom picture and is a component of the illness."

"The easiest and most reliable lab test for adrenal fatigue is the salivary hormone test. It should include: cortisol, DHEAs, progesterone, estrogen and testosterone. The adrenals produce a significant amount of sex hormones. In women, more than 50% of testosterone, 40% of estrogen and a significant amount of progesterone is produced by their adrenals. In men, about 40% of testosterone and nearly all of the estrogen and progesterone is secreted by their adrenal glands."

"Unfortunately, most doctors are not well-versed in low adrenal function. They still labour under the false impression that the only form of low adrenal function is Addison's disease. Addison's disease is the failure of the adrenal glands and is relatively rare, with an incidence of approximately 1 in 23,000. So, even though several cases of adrenal fatigue are seen daily in the typical clinic, they are usually overlooked or misdiagnosed by the attending physician."

"However, one of the most exciting things about the treatment of adrenal fatigue is that even though people experiencing it, often feel terrible and may be severely limited in their ability to function (I have had patients who are not even able to get out of bed or to dress themselves because their adrenal fatigue was so severe), once it is properly diagnosed and treated, complete recovery is not only possible, but very likely."

Based on decades of clinical experience and his science training, Dr. Wilson wrote the book *Adrenal Fatigue: The 21st Century Stress Syndrome* to be a comprehensive guide for treatment and recovery.

In addition, he formulated four dietary supplements (Dr. Wilson's "Adrenal Fatigue Protocol®") to be taken together according to specific instructions to help people recover from even the most severe adrenal fatigue.

"Following the dietary and lifestyle changes detailed in the book, and taking the supplement protocol regularly usually begins to produce noticeable results within three to four weeks. But, adrenal fatigue takes time to totally heal. For people with mild adrenal fatigue – six months; moderate – nine to twelve months; severe – up to two years for full recovery."

"It was very exciting to realize I had found the deep, deep healing for people debilitated by chronic stress."

"Our real goal as holistic healthcare practitioners is to bring back homeostasis...what we want to do is work as deeply as possible to have as profound an effect as possible to re-establish balance (health)."

Becoming healthier involves change:

"It's changing our lifestyles, our thoughts and belief systems. It's providing the body's own innate systems with what they need – and then nature does the healing. Diet, lifestyle, mental practices, breathing, nutrition, supplements, homeopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture, and the many modalities available to the natural medicine practitioner provide so many options for helping a patient get well."

"I would feel so limited if I had to practice the way most conventional medical doctors do. They have to rely almost entirely on pharmaceuticals and surgery...their medical societies don't support the use of the many powerful natural medicines. This leaves them unable to deal with so many illnesses, especially chronic ones. Natural medicine has become a force to deal with."

*Dr. James Wilson's book and supplements are available from Nutrisearch. [New Zealand & Australia Toll Free – NZ: 0800-88-44-33 AU: 1800-177-95, www.adrenalfatigue.co.nz]

Disclosure: Nutrisearch is an advertiser in *The NZ Journal of Natural Medicine*.