



Episode 51:

Stress, Adrenals and Your Energy with Dr. Doni Wilson and Evan H. Hirsch, MD

[00:00:00] Evan H. Hirsch, MD

Hello and welcome to the FIX YOUR FATIGUE podcast. Whether you can't get out of bed in the morning, your energy crashes throughout the day, or you're a biohacker looking to optimize your energy, productivity and focus. This podcast is for you. I am Dr. Evan Hirsch. And I will be your host on your journey to resolving fatigue and optimizing your energy. And we'll be interviewing some of the top leaders in the world on fatigue resolution. Welcome.

Hey, everybody. Welcome back to the energy MD podcast, formerly known as the Fix Your Fatigue podcast, where we help leaders of communities, governments, businesses, and families take their energy to the next level. So they can have more fun and more success in every aspect of their lives. And so one of the things that we talk about, one of the 33 causes that we talk about is negative emotional patterns. And stress. And so today I'm really excited to be talking with Dr. Doni Wilson, all about that. So let's learn a little bit about Dr. Doni. So she is a naturopathic doctor, natural health expert certified professional midwife certified nutrition specialist, and author of the Stress Remedy and Master your Stress Reset Your Health. She graduated from Bastyr university in 2000. She created her stress recovery protocol to solve for migraines and health challenges. For more than 22 years, she has helped thousands of patients overcome health challenges and achieve wellness by using specific strategies that address the whole body and ultimately resolve the underlying causes of distress. She loves teaching patients to know what they need to move from stress to thriving, live well and do what they love with ease. Dr. Doni brings awareness to the impact of stress on our health and to the strategies and solutions for stress recovery through the media and at public and professional events. You can find articles, other resources, her podcast, how humans heal and herself, C A R E care program at Dr. Doni D O N i.com. Dr. Doni. Thanks so much for hanging out with me today.

[00:02:15] Doni Wilson, ND:

Oh my gosh. I'm so excited to be here, thank you..

[00:02:18] Evan H. Hirsch, MD:

So we're going to be talking about calm anxiety, boosting energy and beating burnout. So let's start off first with stress. How do you define stress?

[00:02:31] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

This is the thing is that I like to point out that stress is the cycle, emotional stress is that we're often thinking of, right? Like. Even just, whether that's a financial stress or relationships or with a job or with loved ones and our families and interactions with other humans, , you know, that psycho-emotional level of stress. But to me, stress also comes in the form of physical stresses, such as from, uh, injury or infection. , also comes in the form of toxins that can be a stress to our bodies. Right. So if we have pesticide exposure, mold toxicity, these are. All things that cause our body to have to respond and try to protect us and adapt to that stress exposure.

It can also be things like just not getting enough sleep or eating foods that are creating inflammation in our bodies. And so once we start to really understand stress in that more broad way, we see that it's. First of all, having a huge influence on our health. And we know from epigenetics and research, that so much of our health is determined by our environmental exposures alert our stress exposure, essentially, and so by knowing that then we have also so much power at our fingertips to have a positive impact on our health, by shifting and addressing our stress exposure.

[00:03:54] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Yeah, I'm so glad that you brought that up about that. It's more than just mental, emotional, that there is this physical and this environmental component. Now they all affect the body. And kind of similar ways though. Can you talk a little bit in terms of like stress and the stress response? Can you talk a little bit about, , the stress response?

[00:04:15] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Definitely. So there's, there's really like two key aspects of the human stress response. There's what we think of as a fight or flight response, which is this immediate sympathetic nervous system sending out adrenaline to help get us out of danger quickly. And I think people are more aware of maybe what that feels like when your heart's racing, your blood's pumping, you're sweating. Your mind is like, How do I get out of this situation? And so that's the quick response. , and then there's the, a little bit after that response, which is the HPA axis where the brain is telling the adrenal glands to respond to stress, the adrenal glands then make cortisol and also adrenaline. And so this is why we think of cortisol as our main stress hormone is because then it circulates through the body, sending out a stress signal throughout our whole bodies, basically. Hey this, you know, right now there's a stress going on. Everything else needs to down grade and decrease in function while we deal with the stress. And what should happen is as the stress goes away. Right? So say the siren goes off. Uh, or some emergency happens. Our stress response gets us out of danger. When the danger goes away, then our, our stress hormones should come back to more of an optimal level. We don't want zero cortisol and zero adrenaline. We actually want the optimal amount for that time of day.

[00:05:41] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

That's helpful. So, so then. How does, so then stress, stress is affecting us differently though. Like different people deal with stress differently. Right? How does that work?

[00:05:57] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Well, and this is where I really like to point out, even though we're all human and we all have a built-in stress response system, it actually is quite unique to each of us. And this is also based on our. And our past stress exposure from our childhood, as well as even from our parents and our grandparents, all of this influences. I'm going to respond to stress in the moment versus how you're going to respond. And when I say respond, what I mean is is, is your, how is your cortisol and adrenaline going to react? Now, this is less about an acute stress response, right? That I was just describing where the alarm goes off and we all are going to have cortisol and adrenaline react. But what we're really wanting to understand in terms of long-term health and how we feel on a daily basis and how to prevent long-term health issues what we really want to pay attention to is how does stress affect us over time? And the thing about our modern lives is that we're exposed to stress so much. So often, basically constantly and so much so that our bodies get stuck in a stress response instead of it turning on and off nicely, so many people live in a constant stress response. And when that's the case, that's when our cortisol and adrenaline levels shift into a pattern. and just kind of get stuck there instead of being in an optimal cortisol adrenaline level, they might be, it might be too high cortisol or too high adrenaline or both, or might be too low, cortisol, too low adrenaline or both. And that's where it becomes unique. And the reason why this is so important is because the treatment is different. So say, a person has a health issue that's caused by stress. They might've even gone to the conventional doctor's office and, you know, say been told, Hey, your blood pressure is high because you are under stress or you have IBS digestive issues because you've been under stress. But usually then the person is just sent out the door and they're like, well, what am I supposed to do? This is my life. How am I supposed to, what am I going to do about this? And so what I research and have helped patients do over the past couple of decades is to say, well, that's not good enough to just say, oh, well, it is caused by stress. I'm going to take a medication to suppress it for me. I wanted to be able to solve it. I wanted to say, okay, if it's caused by stress, how do we solve that? How do we actually get these cortisol and adrenaline levels back to optimal so that we don't have health issues being caused by stress. And so this to be able to solve and get that cortisol and adrenaline back to optimal, we have to know where we're starting from.

Right? We can't get to where we're trying to go, unless we know where we're starting from.

[00:08:45] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And so, so then if I were to ask you that question, well, how do you fix it? How do you balance it? It sounds like it's different by different type. I know you talk about these stress types. Is that the next place to go?

[00:08:58] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Yes exactly. Because the thing is that I found, and this is again, because I've for the past couple of decades, been measuring thousands of people's cortisol levels and adrenaline levels. And so, , this is and measuring my own by the way. So this started with me completely hitting a burnout, you know, where I was like, what's going on? I'm getting migraines. I'm fatigued, I'm anxious. I don't know how I'm going to keep up with my life kind of a situation that I think a lot of us find ourselves in like, what is going on. And even if, you know, the regular blood work is normal, you're like, I don't feel normal. There's gotta be something happening. And so I started measuring my levels and subsequently then started measuring my patient's levels. And so now a couple of decades later, I've seen thousands of cortisol levels and adrenaline levels. And I start to look for patterns, right? Like. And I would think that most people listening, because this is your, for most audiences, if I say, guess what your cortisol is up to, you know, do you think you might have high or low cortisol? A lot of people will guess that they have high cortisol because that's what we hear about most often is high cortisol. But in actuality, when I actually look at the numbers, it's not a majority have high cortisol. There's a pretty much equal percentage that have low cortisol and. . And like you're saying, this is, this is what then determines the stress types. So I looked for what are the common patterns of cortisol and adrenaline, not just in the morning, but at different times a day, because cortisol is a hormone that should normally be higher in the morning, gradually decreasing through the day. So we actually need to measure it. Morning, midday, evening and bedtime and adrenaline pretty much is, is about the same throughout the day. So we only measure that once. So what I found is that there were five most common patterns of cortisol and adrenaline, dysregulation, or imbalance. And those are the five stress types that I talk about in the book, master your stress book and. Again, the reason why clinically that was so important to me, because if you, if you look at this, say as a physiologist, it may, it may be a completely different reason, but clinically I'm trying to help my patients improve their health and prevent health issues. So the reason it's so important is the treatment is different. So each stress type requires a slightly different treatment in order to effectively get their cortisol and adrenaline back to optimal.

[00:11:31] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Interesting. So, can you give us a, an example of some of these stress types?

[00:11:37] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

So the Stress Magnet is the stress type that has high cortisol, high adrenaline at some point in the day or all day. And so with a Stress Magnet, for example, if we have high cortisol high adrenaline, we're going to want to use herbs that and nutrients that. Bring that down. So what we're using, we're looking at the research and we see, oh, there's actually studies on substances, such as Phosphatidylserine that helps tell the hypothalamic. Access to turn off the stimulation of cortisol. So that's going to be perfect for someone who's a Stress Magnet. They then Phosphatidylserine makes sense for them to take, because it can help turn down their cortisol. It's not going to turn it off again. We want a good amount. We want a healthy amount, but if we can just turn the dimmer switch. So it tones down to a healthy level. That'd be a good thing. Or we can use herbs like ashwagandha and Magnolia, root there's research shows. Those herbs are particularly. good at bringing the cortisol down when it's too high. Now, if a person has too high cortisol in the morning, we're going to give those nutrients and herbs in the morning to help bring it down. If their levels are too high at night, that makes them a different stress type. By the

way, it's called the Night Owl. The Night Owl has high cortisol high adrenaline in the evening. So it's more likely it's going to disrupt their sleep or maybe in the middle of the night they're waking up. Then we're going to use the Phosphatidylserine and ashwagandha at that time of day and night. So even with that example, it's a different treatment, right? It's if we, if we gave the Night Owl ashwagandha in the morning, it's probably not going to help them with their Night Owl situation. We've got to dose it at the right time. And then there's the Blah and Blue stress type that has low cortisol, low adrenaline, and they're going to need completely different nutrients and herbs. So if they're and I can't tell you, oh my gosh. So just, just yesterday, I talked to a patient who came in her practitioner had tested her cortisol levels. So I'm so glad. Cause a lot of times it's not even getting tested. They had tested the cortisol, but they gave completely the opposite herbs for her situation. She had low cortisol, so Blah and Blue type stress type. And she was given as a supplement for someone who's a Stress Magnet. So it was a completely wrong treatment for her stress type. It's not going to help her any, right. It's it may not hurt very much, but she's not going to feel better, not going to see an improvement. So we need to, to me, I feel that like, passionate about it. I'm like, I think everybody really needs to know their stress type, so they get the right treatment so they can feel better.

[00:14:22] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Nice. Yeah. I love these names. This is great. And so you mentioned three of them. So the Stress Magnet, Blah and Blue. And what was the other one, Night Owl. And then there's two more?.

[00:14:34] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Two more. So the two others have kind of a combination. One of them has high cortisol with low adrenaline that's I call Sluggish and Stressed and then the other one has the opposite. They have, high adrenaline and low cortisol. That's Tired and Wired and their symptoms are, could be slightly different. Here's the other thing is all of these stress types could experience fatigue. They might have any of them might have anxiety. Any of them might have. Some amount of sleep issues. And so. We can go by the symptoms to some degree. And that's what we use in the book. And on my website, we have a stress test, a stress type test to help you identify your stress type based on your symptoms. And based on my research to say, how can we get close based on how you feel during the day, but really to know for sure your stress type you're going to want to do a cortisol and adrenaline test. Which is not, you know, in the conventional doctor's office, you're going to need to work with a specialty practitioner who can order this out-of-pocket test at this point in time. Anyway, I hope, oh my gosh. Wouldn't that be amazing. If at some point in time it's going to be so much easier to measure our cortisol and adrenaline levels. I mean, To me again, it's then we can actually know what to do. Talk about biohacking. Like, to me, this is the ultimate in terms of biohacking to say, Hey, what do I need to be doing to keep my cortisol and adrenaline optimal when I'm exposed to stress? Because ultimately as humans we're going to have stress, right? It's. To try to eliminate all stress would cause more stress. So don't try to go and be stress-free. Yes, we can take steps to reduce our stress exposure. But to me, it's more a matter of how do we support ourselves effectively in our daily lives to prevent the stress from sending our levels all out of balance..

[00:16:29] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Yeah, that's great. So when you, so you mentioned that a lot of these different types can cause fatigue and you know, this is the energy MD podcast. And so, , a lot of the people who are listening are going to have low energy. Would you say, and I think you said pretty much any type can cause low energy or there's some that you see more than others.

[00:16:52] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

It's a little so here's and this is what you'll see. , and I invite anyone listening to do the stress type quiz. , what I do is I tease it apart very carefully and I go, okay. What time of day is your fatigue? The, the worst, right? Are you most fatigued when you wake up in the morning? Are you most, are you, you have a little energy in the morning and then you kind of like Peter out men midway through the day. Are you tired all day? You know, like let's look at this fatigue a little more closely and understand how is it really looking to you? Because we do know that. Fatigue is more likely in someone who has low cortisol. But I also like to point out that someone who has high cortisol can also experience fatigue. So it's not so black and white, we need to look at other things too. So usually when someone has fatigue, they may also have anxiety let's say, or low mood, or maybe other symptoms, heart palpitations. Right. So we need to look at more than just the fatigue to understand the stress type.

[00:17:56] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

That's helpful. So with other adrenal type symptoms, like orthostatics, , where does that fit in with the stress types?

[00:18:08] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

You're talking about like orthostatic blood pressure and how we feel when we change our yeah. That's such a good one, right? That's a classic, , you know, back when I was training as a naturopathic doctor, that was, you know, again, one of the most common tests we use was because we, you can't. Yes. In regular blood work, you can look at sodium potassium levels and you could try to get a sense of adrenal status from that. But it's like, Very very non-specific. I would say it would only give you a heads up that maybe there's something going on here. And I should test further even with the, , orthostatic blood pressure. So this would be say if someone goes from laying down to standing up and they start to feel dizzy. So if someone's listening there, I mean, I use I'm a classic Blah and Blue, by the way. And classic Blah and Blue is the person who most likely is going to have this, , orthostatic hypotension, where when you change your posture, your, your blood flow, doesn't keep up with you until you're light headed until your blood starts circulating to your brain.

Again. And so, You know, I was constantly like, if I stood up too fast, I'm like, whoa, all dizzy. And, , and so, yeah, that's the most common, uh, stress type to experience that as Blah and Blue, but also the Sluggish and Stressed and Tired and Wired could experience a little bit of that as well, because they have either low adrenaline, low cortisol. And so they could experience a little bit of those orthostatic symptoms also.

[00:19:36] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Interesting. So question about like the relationship of circadian rhythm to some of this, cause you were talking about like the Night Owl and giving them things at night. And I find also that by giving them things in the morning to recreate the circadian rhythm, that, that ends up help helping to recreate the adrenal curve per se. And then, , is that your experience as well?

[00:20:00] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

I love that you're bringing this up because it's, to me it's like so much of how we can help our bodies and our brains and our stress response recover from stress is to, first of all, realize we're living in human bodies on earth and we are going to respond to light and darkness. That's part of our, I call it our stress radar system, our stress radar systems gone to constantly notice changes in dark and lightness or, uh, changes in sound. Even if. Clothes while we're sleeping, our brain is still picking up on different stresses around us, right? That's why we wake up. If we hear a sound or the light goes on. And so light exposure is so key to what, how we're getting exposed to stress, but also for stress recovery and the circadian rhythm is this sleep and wake cycle. You know, when is it, then we, the cortisol increases in the morning and it tells our body it's time to wake up. And the cortisol gradually decreases and is lowest at night. Helping to signal that it's time to go to sleep. And that's when the melatonin goes up. Right? So these hormones are helping our body to know whether it's day or night and when, when are we going to sleep. But I think when we live in such a stressed world and a stressful schedule, we, first of all, I think we kind of forget that we're humans and we forget that. Are so responsive to our circadian rhythm. It's amazing how, just by like you're suggesting kind of emphasize like a little bit of, sometimes we have to overemphasize that circadian rhythm and it just really helps our brains get back on track. Like when you wake up in the morning. One of my favorite things to do is get outside and get some sunlight exposure in my eyes and in my brain to tell my brain it's daytime. Right. Versus at night we need to overemphasize the darkness. So that our brain knows it's time for us to go to sleep. , I mean, one thing I write about in the book is, , the past year I had the opportunity to go spend time in Peru, working with a shaman.

And part of that was, , spending two weeks in the Amazon, , where there was no light, there was no electricity, no wifi. And so it really. I had a full experience of being a human on earth with light and darkness, completely determined by the sun and the moon. And it was like, so eye opening to realize like, wow, like when we wake up and it's light outside and our brain is getting exposed to that, it really starts to shift things and we can get so much. Kind of a re sync with our own circadian rhythm and our, all of our other hormone levels. And when it gets dark out. There, you know, yes, I could read by candle light, but that only works for so long at a certain point. You're like, let me just blow out the candle and go to sleep. And it's like, right. It's like such a huge reset. And I share about this in the book because not that everybody needs to go to the Amazon for two weeks, but to just say, how can I bring this into my day to day experience? How can I kind of little bit overemphasize. The light and darkness in our day-to-day lives and see how that helps us with our stress recovery.

[00:23:15] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Nice. That's wonderful. So if I were to hand you a prescription pad and you were to write a prescription for sun time every day, what would you say? How much do you recommend?

[00:23:27] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Well, I mean, of course we have to be careful, we don't want to get a sun burn and of course you have to know your skin and your S you know, and where you're living and, you know, make sure you're protecting your skin. But I would even, you know, we also know that if we're exposed to even like 10 minutes of sunlight to our skin, we're going to get some vitamin D production. So, I mean, even if you start with like 10 minutes, you're probably pretty safe. , and I would do it in the morning. Now, the sun's not as hot, you're less likely to get a sun burn more. And get some sun in your eyes and get some vitamin D stimulated. ,

[00:24:03] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Nice. And then it's sticking with the back to basics sort of theme. What about earthing grounding? What do you think about that?

[00:24:11] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Oh my gosh. I love it. And I that's in the book also. You're in the Pacific Northwest and I'm originally from the Pacific Northwest now.

I don't know if that has anything to do with both of our love of nature and spending time in nature. Right. Like I think there's, you know, people around the world have such beautiful experiences to be in nature, but there's something about the Pacific Northwest, right. That just like makes you go wow. When, cause even though it rains a lot, it's like, you want to be out there. and the research shows that so much research, whether it's of grounding, where we're getting to connect with the electromagnetic energy of the earth and help realign our own electromagnetic energy or just getting to be outside. And I always like to say, look at the colors and symmetries and shapes that exist in nature on, in leaves on trees. and, in the ocean waves and right. Like the more we're exposed to nature, our brain picks up on that immediately. That's why things like what's called forest bathing exists, right? Like we research and we see that when people are in nature, it really helps our bodies reset. Even if you can't get outside, even if you just look at a picture of something from nature, like you see these flowers behind me, I'm always looking for excuses. How do we bring nature. Inside so that our brain is constantly picking up on these colors and shapes, even if we're doing something else.

[00:25:39] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

That's brilliant. Yeah. My wife talks about a savoring practice where you just picture in your mind, you know, where you are, if you want to, you know, I like the beach. So I put my feet in the sand, you know when I'm doing it,

[00:25:51] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Absolutely. That's how we use, say with biofeedback, I spent, I don't know, months reviewing all the research on all of these things. , the earth thing on light exposure and biofeedback and meditation and mindfulness, and I was looking for. You know, cause I put all the references in the book, if anyone's interested, like how is this actually working? And to know that they actually do studies on this to show how beneficial it is, but you know what I was really looking for and I want to see more in the research going forward is I was looking for. Were they studying these activities? I call them stress recovery activities, were they studying these activities based on stress type. Because what I want to know is is a Stress Magnet. Is there a different way they should be. Savoring nature versus a Blah and Blue. Is it a, is it a D should they be doing a different time of day? A different length of time, a different type of, is there a different type of stress recovery activity?

That's better for that stress type. And there's some information that I found in the research and that's what I included in the book, but I really hope that going forward, researchers will do their stress research based on the stress types. Yeah. I mean, it sounds like that would make things more specific for sure. So let's talk about a little bit of the controversies around stress and adrenals. So what do you think of the term adrenal fatigue? Well, this is very common. We hear adrenal fatigue. We hear adrenal exhaustion. , we hear of even burnout as common terms associated with adrenal dysfunction. And the thing for me is that. It's not specific enough, you know, and it's actually kind of confusing because if we say adrenal fatigue, now that makes sense for someone who has fatigue, but it doesn't tell us what is their cortisone adrenaline level. Right. We still need to test it and find out what exactly is happening in order to really help cause different people with adrenal fatigue could have, could require a completely different treatment plan. So what I did in. Research is, and this, by the way, this is based on somewhat of the original research by Han Sally and maladaptive set stress syndrome. He's a physiologist. And so he, he, oh my gosh, thank goodness for his research and everything he wrote about the adrenal glands. He's writing it from the perspective of a physiologist. So what happens to a human over time longitudinally? What I'm looking at is different because I'm a clinician. So I'm looking at my patient at this moment in time. I need a cross-sectional view of this longitude, longitudinal exposure to Trent stress. I need to know where are they right at this moment in time. And so classically in the maladaptive stress syndrome, people will go through, uh, maybe they have high cortisol adrenaline. Imbalanced, and then it goes low. But the issue with that model clinically is that it makes it seem like a person would have to maybe be exposed to more stress or older age to become into this pattern of what we call adrenal fatigue. So I kept saying this isn't helping me with myself or my patients. I need a different model. And so I said, I want to know this cross-sectional view. And that's when I identified these stress types to say, this is where we are at this moment in time. And so instead of using the term adrenal fatigue, I use the term adrenal distress because at that moment, what I know is that the person has district. In their adrenal function. We know that it's not as healthy as it could be. Then we're going to go from adrenal distress and identify this specific stress type. Now we're getting more specific. Now we can give the appropriate treatment. Okay, thank you. And, and so then in terms of the, the stages or the let's talk about chronic stress, I guess. So, you know, acutely the, well, I'll let you describe it. Like, what is the difference between what's happening with the adrenal gland with acute stress versus chronic stress? , and then I'll ask my next question. Yeah. Well, and here's the thing, as I mentioned, we're. I even writing a book involved some stress and definitely, you know, like every day I'm not gonna aim to try to be stress-free, you know, like I know that life is going to involve some stress. Attempt to choose my stress wisely, choose to engage in stresses that I enjoy. Hopefully, although there's some that happened, my father recently had a stroke. I didn't choose

that. It's not something I enjoy, but I'm in the situation of now needing to respond to it. Right. So now I'm in a situation of an acute stress. My mom calls it. He's choking. Okay. He needs to go to the emergency room. That's an acute stress for me and for my father. Right. We need to respond in the moment and what I'm, what I would hope for is in that acute stress response. I actually want my adrenaline and cortisol to respond. It's going to help me make quick decisions and do what I need to do to respond in the moment. Right? So we actually want a healthy stress response. That's why. We often will use heart rate variability as a way to measure a person's healthy stress response. Right. We know that when a person has a better heart rate variability, that they actually are better at going into an acute response and back out of an acute stress response. We actually want that. And I think sometimes that's hard to grasp as humans because we tend to think that we want things to stay the same, or we want things to be black or. And when it comes to our stress response, what's more optimal for our health actually is to be able to respond and recover, respond, recover, like walk this, you know, kind of line is tight rope and be able to, to not fall off one too far, one direction or the other. Now when we're under chronic stress, it becomes a matter of how do we. How do we help ourselves recover? Because to me, when I hear chronic stress, what I hear is a person who stress response got stuck. They ended up in a stress response. It didn't turn off. It's like the light switch is stuck on and their cortisone adrenaline is firing constantly in the body. Now. God to come out of stress mode. Now they're in a chronic stress state and that's when all kinds of health issues start to develop. We have, it affects our digestion. So we get all kinds of digestive symptoms. It affects all the other hormones in the body. So we ended up with thyroid issues and blood sugar issues and you name it. Estrogen, progesterone, testosterone. They're all affected by chronic stress, also our immune system. So we become more susceptible to infections allergies. Auto-immune. And it affects our neuro-transmitters. So this is like serotonin GABA, dopamine. It affects our mood, our focus, our sleep, our energy. And so chronic stress that's not being addressed is really the cause of most all have health issues. Let alone heart disease, diabetes, dementia, and care. Right. , the leading causes of death of humans is caused by chronic stress. So that's why to me, it's all about how do we master our chronic stress? How do we, how do we get it to the point where we're not falling into chronic stress and back out of it and back into chronic stress and back out of it? I want to, I, what my goal is, is to be. I think of it as resilience, but on the title of the book, I call it mastering your stress. How do you get to the point where you can be in a stress response and recover and just float there? Just be right there. Just constantly be helping your body recover in the moment every day. Then we're not susceptible to the effects of chronic.

[00:34:08] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

I love that. And I definitely want to go in that direction. , but I want to come back for a second to like chronic stress and this idea of stages of adrenal gland dysfunction over time. Do you believe in that? Do you see that? And then how does that relate to the different types? Cause it seems like if you have high cortisol initially, and it goes down over time that that could be related with some of these different.

[00:34:36] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Yeah, it's interesting. Right? So this is what I, I'm so glad you're asking me, because this is what I think about all the time and the thing is that what I saw over time. I mean, and this is just because I, now I've been seeing patients for over 22 years, so I don't, you know, I'm curious, what's going to happen in the next 22 years of seeing patients. But what I see so far for my patients and for myself is that. It's less about going into, like, it's less likely that a person's going to change over time. What tends to happen is they have a stress pattern that their body goes towards. Every time they're overly stressed. So for me, if I'm overly stressed and not doing enough of my stress recovery, that I teach you how to do in the book, if I'm not following, I'm not walking my talk, then I fall into being overstressed and my cortisol and adrenaline are going to drop. Because that's my pattern. That's what my body's going to tend toward based on my genetics and my past exposure. And this is what I see over and over with patients like patients would I'd get I'd help them get their cortisol and adrenaline to optimal, and then they would. They'd have a death in the family or a divorce or a big project at work. And then they come back five years later and they'd be like, oh, I'm, I'm feeling awful again. And I would retest their levels and they would be in the same spot. They were five years ago and I'm like, okay, this person's, this is this person's unique pattern. They, it keeps every time they get overly stressed, they end up in this same spot again. So I can then say to you. Let's learn from this. Okay. You tent. If, if you tend to be a Blah and Blue, like me, if we know you're being exposed to stress right now, how about we become proactive and try to prevent it from landing in that same spot again? There's some minor exceptions to what I've seen in that. There's some people where their cortisol adrenaline pattern will change over time. Like over with age, I do see this sometimes with, peri-menopause say women with CBB in their forties, they might have really high cortisol levels. And then as they transition to post-menopause, they end up with these low cortisol. And so I have seen that pattern specifically associated with menopause, but I that's, that's not the generality. Like I have patients who I've seen between age 40 and 60, and they keep going back to their same stress pattern. They aren't shifting to a different one. If that makes sense.

[00:37:20] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

It does. Yeah. And when people get chronic fatigue or they get burnout, does that picture look different where, where the cortisol is either very high or low or anything like that?

[00:37:32] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Definitely. When people have severe fatigue, right? Then they're more likely to have low cortisol that definitely came out in the research. However other patterns can also have fatigue. So I always tell a person if you're feeling tired, I wouldn't just guess that your cortisol is low. I would rather measure it because so many times it's only once I measured it, that I saw their true pattern. Maybe they have low cortisol in the morning, but maybe it's high later in the day. And so I'm going to want to treat the morning different than the evening. , also, I also saw in my research and I see this clinically that it makes a huge difference to measure adrenaline levels because if we're only treating based on cortisone, It's only part of the puzzle. Once I started measuring adrenaline levels. Now I have a whole another puzzle piece because maybe someone with chronic fatigue, they might have low cortisol I'm in the low adrenaline, or they might have high

adrenaline and we need to, if that's the case of the adrenaline high, here's another interesting thing I found in my, in my practice and in my research is that if adrenaline is high, we need to address that first. Before addressing a low cortisol level, because as tempting as it is like so many patients I see who have fatigue, they're like, please help me. I'm can't get through my day. And maybe I see that they have a low cortisol and I have to explain to them, I see you have low cortisol. It makes sense. You feel tired, but I also see that you have say low serotonin and low and high adrenaline. We cannot do anything with your cortisol and how we first address the serotonin and the adrenaline, because otherwise we might just backfire. We might just set you back and make you feel worse. So it's about, this is yet the part three of the book is my stress recovery protocol. Step-by-step because. It's tempting. Right? It's so tempting. When we see a low cortisol and a person has fatigue, it's so tempting to jump right there and address it. But actually lot of people will feel worse if we do that, we need to address the other things first.

[00:39:45] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

It seems like when people have higher adrenaline that they are, they end up getting more anxious. They're more of the wired and tired sort of.

[00:39:53] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Exactly. So if there's this there's, maybe they are tired, but they're also anxious. We have that tells me that there's still in a stress reaction. We need the first phases. Always. We got to calm the stress reaction. We need to calm the adrenaline. If there is high cortisol, we got to drop that down. We've got to calm out of the stress response first. Then we can address the low adrenal function. But I think that's a common error for practitioners is to try to address the adrenals before the person gets out of their stress.

[00:40:27] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Okay. So I guess the last controversy I'll ask you about is, , is laboratory testing. So I know that there are practitioners in the space, even in the alternative space who don't believe that there's any validity, any scientific validity to laboratory testing and its correlation with symptoms. What would you say to them?

[00:40:51] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

I just, when I hear that, I think maybe they haven't read the research or had my clinical experience. I mean, I understand that this is not, it's not commonly taught in medical schools, even in nature, pathic and medical schools. It's I don't, I, most of what I think. I learned after nature by the medical school when in practice. So it's not commonly taught. And I think that a lot of times practitioners go by what they were taught in school. Right. So if it's like, Hey, it wasn't in

the textbook. It doesn't exist. Well, If it's not in the textbook, it just means we haven't figured it out yet. And so that's my perspective on it because I've, I know that there's a ton of studies on the effectiveness of measuring cortisol and adrenaline and neurotransmitter levels. And I see it clinically. I mean, how can I argue with when I get a test result and I give the patient the appropriate treatment and they come back and they feel better and they say, I feel 10 years younger. My, my health issues are disappearing. I feel great. Thank you so much. I'm so glad I found you. How can I then say, oh, this test wasn't accurate.

Like I'm like I did. We just prove that the test was accurate as long as the treatment was specific to those results. And I think that's a lot again where the error happens is some practitioners might be doing the testing. I think a lot of the information out there hasn't been clear about how to address this. And I too fell. I was, I was somewhat trained in how to address this when I first came out of nature by the medical school, but I was completely burned out and I did not know how to fix myself. I had to figure it out. And it's only through figuring it out that I was like, oh, this is what was missing in my training. And this is what's missing in training for most practitioners. So it's no wonder that people kind of give up on it. They're like, oh, it doesn't work to help the adrenals. I never feel any better. Well, I would say if you're not feeling better from addressing your adrenals, you're probably not getting the right treatment for your stress.

[00:42:59] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Yeah. Am. I'm glad you brought in the, uh, that idea of the, , of your clinical experience, because I think that's the big thing, you know, when we were in medical school, I'm sure for you guys as well, 90% of diagnosis is history and symptoms. Right. And 10% is labs and physical exam. And so anytime we lean too heavily on labs in general, we're not going to be successful. We always have to take it into context with what's happening with the individual, uh, in order to make a decision and how to proceed forward. Would you agree?

[00:43:29] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Absolutely. It's you know, all we can do. Practitioners as humans is try to gather as much information as we can and make the best decision based on that information. And so I just tend to have a little bit more open mind and say, Hey, if I'm willing to gather information where either I can get it and then implement it, and I'm always implementing on myself and saying, Hey, I'm going to be an observer. I'm going to be. A scientist here and notice, Hey, if I try this, what kind of outcome do I get? And so then we can constantly be learning something new instead of only relying what we knew in the past.

[00:44:14] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

So let's talk about your care protocol. C A R E.

[00:44:19] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

So CARE stands for clean eating A for adequate sleep R for recovery activities and E for exercise. And these are my, you know, way to organize the different activities on a day-to-day basis that we can choose that all help us with our stress recovery and our ability to bounce back from stress and prevented from causing health issues. So everything from dietary choices that we can make, so we can decrease our exposure to stressful eating stressful foods. , and. You know, making sure we're eating in a way that feeds our body and matches our physiology as best as possible. , also of course sleep, right? Like some I'm believe me. I grew up as a person who was like, oh, I'll sleep later. You know, but actually so much stress recovery happens while we sleep. And so we need to kind of train ourselves. How do we make sure we're getting. Sleep. So we get enough stress recovery, and then the recovery activities we spoke a bit about and the exercise as well as known as one of our best stress recovery tools. But the thing about all of these exercises just happens to be a good example. Is it more is not necessarily better. You know, this is this concept of hormesis, right? If we create, if we implement a change, even say starting to exercise, if we do some amount, it's going to be a stress on our system, but it's going to be a beneficial stress. If it kind of gets our heart rate up and gets our muscles stimulated. Okay. That's a good thing. If we overdo it, something like exercise for sure can actually be a negative stress. We can actually cause an injury and we can raise our cortisol levels. And so this is just to say again, like I think part of mastering stress is understanding that it's not. Doing it more and better and longer. It's actually, how do we learn to be okay with just enough, just the right amount for our bodies at this moment in time.

[00:46:28] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Yeah. And I was, I always love quoting the research on your relationship with stress, right? If you believe that stress is healthy and helpful, then it has a different physiologic effect on the body. Then if you see it as detrimental,

[00:46:45] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

So true. Yeah. Yeah. And it, and because there's studies that show, if we stress about our stress, that's not going to help us any. So it is, it's a tricky thing though, because sometimes when we first mentioned the word stress and the issues they can, cause we start triggering a stress response. And so this is like, I love what you're saying. Like we need to. Having an understanding and awareness and acceptance about it so that we can work with it and be forgiving of ourselves and learning in the moment around stress. Versus it's not about putting more pressure expectation on yourself about this.

[00:47:26] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

And essentially, you're talking about resilience. Right. And so it sounds like you have a daily practice that I would imagine you go through and that you teach in order to build resilience. Can you tell us a little bit about what, what that would look like and like a practical sense for folks?

[00:47:45] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Well, definitely even from thinking about the self care or the C a R E method where we're looking at, how do we. Optimized art, your self-care and your self-care routine daily routine for you based on your stress type. And so in that, the last chapter of the book is really about how do we take everything we've learned. That's going to help you recover from stress based on your stress type and help you to implement it on a daily basis so that it becomes just part of your usual routine. You know how it can just be, oh, when I wake up in the more. I'm going to, maybe it's going to be, I'm going to do a meditation or I'm going to get outside and go for a walk with my dog or whatever it is, but your unique self care routine that just becomes part of your day-to-day life that you enjoy, not something extra on your to-do list. And so that's part of it is really. Developing a self-care routine and it takes time. It's a practice. It can change. Sometimes mine changes day to day or week by week. You know, I like to stay open to what's going on and what do I feel like today? But I know that I have tools that I can choose from that I can go to then also have this awareness for where are you in the stress recovery protocol? Are you at the point of just getting out of stress mode and what do you need to do to implement at that point versus in phase two and phase three, phase three is the resilience phase where again, the goal is about how do we maintain this mastery of stress over time? While we're being humans while we are interacting with family and traveling and running a business and doing the things we love, how do we still maintain our health and resilience to stress as best we can.

[00:49:32] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Yeah, so important. And you know, we've talked about mainly, you know, we talked initially we talked about the different stressors, you know, that will compromise the system.

And we didn't talk about the environmental toxins a lot here. Heavy metals, chemicals, molds infections. , how did those. Into all of this, you know, I oftentimes see replacing the adrenals and supporting the adrenals is a bandaid, even though it's a natural band-aid because once you remove the environmental toxins, then things are just a lot less stressful on the body, besides the mental, emotional stuff that people need to work on. How do you see all that?

[00:50:10] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

I look at it as like a synergy. So it's either a negative synergy where. When we have a toxin exposure say mold toxins, or, oh my gosh. I just talked to a patient who was, had a huge exposure to jet fuel. Oh my gosh. It was, it's like scary. Right? We don't even realize how much this, these toxins were getting exposed to sometimes. And so we can have these toxic exposures that are affecting our. Metabolism our biochemical pathways, , that are causing leaky gut mold toxins, for example, and of course, pesticides too. They ended up causing intestinal permeability and imbalanced gut bacteria, and it becomes this perfect storm because now the gut bacteria are producing their own toxins. You have toxins from the outside and we have toxins from the inside initiative. Sending more stress signals through our body. That's perpetuating the situation. And at the same time, the poor adrenal glands are trying to keep up. They're like, how do we keep up with all this toxin and stress of not feeling well? And so I look at it as I'm going to address both things at once, because what I see is yes, as you mentioned, if we, if we can effectively get the toxins out, then the person starts to already feel. But if we, at the same time, help their cortisol and adrenaline improve, they're going to feel better, faster, and maintain better over time. If we

only do the adrenals and we don't address the toxins, that's not going to work because the toxins are stirring up more trouble. We're just working against ourselves. So it's like, how do we do both? So to me, whether we're dealing with toxicity or say a chronic infection, Lyme or Epstein-Barr or HPV. Yes. We're going to go after that chronic infection, but we need to also optimize the cortisol and adrenaline levels because now you've got a body that's back in synergy that the cortisone adrenaline at optimal levels is going to help you detoxify. It's going to help you. And address the infection, right? So we need both. We need to help eliminate any of these chronic stresses, like infections and toxins. We need to help eliminate them, but we can, the health is gonna improve so much more if we're also addressing the cortisol adrenaline or basically the adrenal fatigue.

[00:52:29] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Great Advice. Well, I could talk to you all day and I've really enjoyed this, but I will let you go. But first, can you tell us and our audience where they can find you?

[00:52:40] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Oh yes. well, Donieis, is Don and I, and you can find me at [Dr. doni.com](http://Dr.doni.com), which you can spell as Dr. Don. And [I. D O C T O R D O N I.com](http://I.D.O.C.T.O.R.D.O.N.I.com). And I love to yes. Do podcasts and blog articles and write books. And because for some reason, I just wake up every day thinking about this and trying to find more ways to share this information with others so they can benefit from it. I'm on also social media, usually as Dr. Doni Wilson. although on Twitter, I'm the gluten-free doc.

[00:53:14] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Nice. And then you have a free gift for our audience, which is the,

[00:53:20] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

The seven day self care stress reset. So in this seven days, so basically a week and one week I'm teaching you how to start to implement the self-care that we talked about based on your stress type, because I want you to start to. Get the feel for it and see how possible it is. Right? Like sometimes it sounds scary. Like, oh, I'm going to start that tomorrow, maybe next month. Right. But I want you to know, like, this is something you can do in your usual day-to-day life. It really is an actually it's when we do it in our day to day life that we're most successful anyway.

[00:53:57] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

Brilliant. Dr. Doni, I appreciate you so much. Thanks so much for hanging out with me today.

[00:54:03] **Doni Wilson, ND:**

Likewise. Thank you. Let's do it again soon.

[00:54:08] **Evan H. Hirsch, MD:**

I hope you learned something on today's podcast. If you did, please share it with your friends and family and leave us a five star review on iTunes. It's really helpful for getting this information out to more fatigue people who desperately need it. Sharing all the experts I know and love and the powerful tips I have on fatigue is one of my absolute favorite things to do. If you'd like more information, please sign up for my newsletter, where I share all important facts and information about fatigue from the foods and supplements to the programs and products that I use personally and recommend to others so that they can live their best lives. Just go to [fix your fatigue.com](http://fixyourfatigue.com) forward slash newsletter to sign up and I will send you this great information. Thanks for being part of my community. Just a reminder, this podcast is for educational purposes only, and is not a substitute for professional care by a doctor or other qualified medical professional. It is provided with the understanding that it does not constitute medical or other professional advice or services. If you're looking for help with your fatigue, you can visit my website and work with us at [fix your fatigue.com](http://fixyourfatigue.com) And remember, it's important that you have someone in your corner who is a credentialed health care professional to help you make changes. This is very important and especially when it comes to your health. Thanks for listening, and have an amazing day.