



Beware of **BORROWED ENERGY**

If health is your goal, stay away from stimulants, raw as well as cooked, says Brendan Brazier.

Unexpectedly hearing a loud noise when the room is quiet you might feel a sudden rush of energy. This is the most basic form of stimulation, left over from your primal survival mechanism. Your body assumes the loud noise is a threat and so prepares you for action by engaging the adrenal glands to draw more energy. In reaction to the onset of stimulation – a form of stress – we gain energy. We become more alert, our strength can increase and we have the ability to process information and to react more quickly. Summoning its hormonal resources to

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momentarily improve strength and reaction time, the body would have likely improved its odds of getting out of a prehistoric bind. Early man would have of course benefited from greater strength and quicker reaction time if confronted by a predatory animal; his odds of survival would have dramatically increased.

Of course, we aren't confronted with those types of threats today. But we face a host of modern-day ones that evoke the same hormonal response. Stress of any kind – be it too much work, family-related concerns, poor diet, breathing impure air, constantly having to be “on” and not enough down time – puts strain on the adrenal glands.

What is actually happening when the body is confronted with stress? To varying degrees, based on the body's perception of the severity of the stress, it releases cortisol. As mentioned, cortisol was designed to stimulate us to deal with the apparent threat. The downside is that the result of regular stimulation is fatigue. Since our adrenal glands were not designed

to be used as often as they are today, it is common for them to become overworked, resulting in exhaustion. Adrenal burn-out, as it is commonly referred to, has become a widespread modern-day problem. If stress (and therefore cortisol) remains elevated, several problems arise; one being that the body shifts fuel sources. Switching from burning fat as fuel, a stressed person's system will have replaced its use with carbohydrate in the form of sugar. Now burning more sugar and less fat, the body will begin to store body fat instead of using it for energy.

Stress-free people are fat burning machines. Not the case for stressed ones: they burn – and therefore crave – carbohydrates. This leads to over-worked adrenal glands, adrenal fatigue and eventually to a host of stress-related impairments. A reduction in sleep quality is also a common consequence of elevated cortisol levels.

Biological debt

I use the term *biological debt* to refer to a state that the body goes into after energy from stimulation has dissipated. Often brought about in the modern world by eating refined sugar or drinking coffee to gain energy in the short term, biological debt is a state of fatigue. Unfortunately, it is a state that many average-diet-eating westerners are accustomed to living in. But now biological debt has found its way into the health food and even the raw food arena.

For long-term health and vitality, we need to understand the difference between

two types of energy: one obtained from stimulation, the other from nourishment. As a general rule, the more processed a food is, the more stimulating its effect will be on the nervous system, and the less nourishing. In contrast, the more natural and whole a food is – raw and sprouted being the best – the less stimulating and the more nourishing it will be.

As a society, because of our insatiable desire for quick, convenient energy “on the go,” our streets are crammed with coffee, doughnut, and fast food establishments. This solves the convenience problem and offers a short-term energy solution through stimulation. However, it does nothing to help with the payment inevitably required by the body if this route is taken regularly.

The body can subsist on stimulating, nutrient-deficient food only for so long before becoming either exhausted or sick. This problem was once only true for those who ate an unhealthy diet comprised largely of stimulating foods such as refined flour, refined sugar, coffee and caffeinated soda. But other forms of stimulating foods have become prevalent in the raw food world – cacao, or raw chocolate, being the most notable. As with any food that contains caffeine, cacao is stimulating, which will result in an energy surge and a sense of well-being in the short term, but in greater fatigue days later.

Therefore, the desire to eat more of it to ward off fatigue becomes stronger, and this, some would suggest, is the beginning of a dependency. This can lead to the *need* for regular consumption of cacao to maintain energy and a sense of well-being, which of course is not healthy. Dependence on a stimulating substance never is. Additionally, caffeine-containing foods raise cortisol levels, which lowers immunity, making the body more

vulnerable to infection and eventually leading to the storage of body fat and the creation of inflammation.

Stress – stimulation – sickness

Many of us are in a constant state of biological debt. It is a huge contributing factor to overall stress and therefore has become a major precipitator of fatigue, weight gain, and compromised health in general. If untreated, it can lead to serious diseases.

One measure of health is having cost-free energy – energy that lasts and does not have to be “stoked” continually with stimulating foods. The stoking of energy can end in one result only: less energy. Stimulating foods are certainly not part of a sustainable, high-energy diet. As you can see from the illustration below, stress triggers the spiral.

For the average North American, 40 percent of that stress can be directly linked to diet. With the first onset of stress comes natural adrenal stimulation, which is not unhealthy in small doses. The rise in cortisol levels, however, *always* results in fatigue. That is, any kind of stimulation, regardless of how dramatic or mild, produces short-term energy, but it is always followed by fatigue. The degree of fatigue depends on the degree of stimulation: the greater the stimulation, the greater the fatigue. The healthiest things a person can do at this point are to rest and remove the elements causing the stress, such as poor diet.

Yet this is when most people turn to self-imposed adrenal stimulation such as coffee and refined foods in the regular world and cacao in the raw world, to regain energy. This results

in a short burst of energy, then greater fatigue and more stimulation to try and re-energize. The circle is complete.

Each time the circle completes itself, the severity of the condition increases, creating an incremental decline in health and an increased risk factor for serious disease. As the illustration shows, the first completion of the circle will likely result only in a slightly increased appetite. The next time around will result in cravings, likely for starchy, refined foods (often making raw foodists more tempted by cooked food). Sequential passes involve difficulty sleeping, irritability, mental fog, lack of motivation, body fat gain, lean muscle loss, visible signs of premature aging, and sickness. Each round produces a more severe symptom, on top of the previous ones, compounding the effect. If this cycle of chronically-elevated cortisol levels is allowed to continue, tissue degeneration, depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, and even more serious diseases can develop.

A healthy, sustainable whole food diet and lifestyle will be one that does not require additional stimulation through food. As a result your body will re-establish its sensory system, functioning at a healthier, more energetic level – without the cellular-damaging need for stimulation. Recalibration can be achieved by removing as much of the stimuli as possible for a set period.

The less stimulation a person has in everyday life, the greater impact stimuli will have on the body. This is good. It means the person is living a low-stress life, and we all know the benefits of that. But there's more to it. It also means that considerably

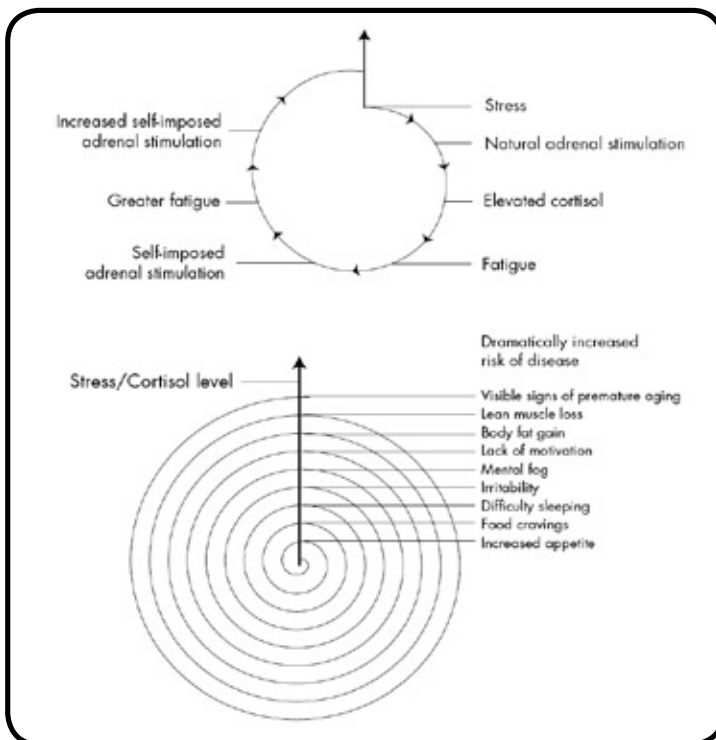
less stimulation is needed to evoke a stress response from the adrenal glands. One of the body's most resourceful traits is its ability to adapt. Acclimatizing to stimulation is no exception.

Recalibrating to benefit from small amounts of stimulation

Here's an example. When you turn on a light in a dark room, it seems very bright, although it really is no brighter than usual. Similarly, when ambient sound levels are low, the body's sense of hearing is heightened. Have you ever noticed that sometimes the phone's ring sounds very loud, and at other times it sounds relatively quiet? The key word is *relatively*. Our body has the ability to adjust to much of what goes on around it.

To calibrate its sensory system, the body must decide at what level it will sense stimuli. The only gauge the body has is through the information we feed it: sound, sight, touch, smell, and taste. Its decision is based on the level at which we supply that information. If we eat a daily serving of cacao to increase our energy, it won't take long before its effect is diminished; before one serving will no longer provide the boost it once did. It might seem logical, then, to eat more to get the energy that a single serving used to deliver. But where does this cycle end?

Our bodies are chronically over-stimulated, yet most of us don't realize it. Our bodies have adapted, but at a cost. Constantly having to climb to a new level to remain in the same place is a tough way to live, yet all



Extracted from *The Thrive Diet* with permission.



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too common. The way to fix this problem – to remove considerable stress from the body and in doing so increase energy – is to recalibrate the body. A healthy, plant-based diet free of stimulants will serve as a solid platform.

When and how stimulation can benefit you

Not all stimulation is bad or always has a negative effect. It will always result in greater fatigue as mentioned above, but its value is determined by what it is summoned for. When the adrenal glands are stimulated in order to achieve something that could not be done, or done as well, without this stimulation, the stress that results can be viewed as positive. I call this kind of stress *production stress* in my book, *The Thrive Diet*.

Here's a way in which stimulation can be used to one's advantage: an athlete who has recalibrated by eating a clean diet and has abstained from all stimulating foods – including cacao – can benefit from a small amount of adrenal stimulation before a race. Drinking a cup of yerba maté (a South American herb) or eating a small amount of cacao before a race

will boost performance. The caffeine in the yerba maté or cacao will stimulate the adrenal glands, thereby improving endurance and facilitating a better performance than would have otherwise been possible. This will also bring about greater fatigue within a day or two, and that's fine. At the time of the race, the athlete simply borrowed energy from the future to fuel performance. Extra fatigue a day or two later will be a small price to pay for his

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elevated performance. The same holds true for those trying to get more done at work. Stimulation can enable them to achieve more in the short term.

However, if this borrowing strategy is used too often, it will lose its effectiveness and simply become another form of stress that perpetuates the cycle. To be effective, the strategy can be used only a few times a month, and once a week at most, for those times when a boost would really be beneficial. Ideally, you would rarely, if ever, need it; a

healthy diet that is stimulant-free will provide you energy by nourishment.

If stimulation is used when it will not help you achieve something of value, it is of no value, and as explained above, a detriment. I term it *uncomplementary stress*. I consider the regular consumption of cacao a form of an *uncomplementary stress*. I view it as a form of credit, similar to shopping with a credit card. You get energy now that you don't

actually have, but you pay for it later – when the “bill,” or fatigue, hits. Simply eating more cacao to put off the inevitable is like paying off one credit card with another: it will catch up with you sooner or later. You'll most likely pay a high interest rate as well, needing more time to recover than if that energy had not been borrowed in the first place. This is the beginning of a vicious circle.

One of the main attributes of a healthy diet should be adequate energy through nourishment, without the need to artificially stimulate the adrenals to gain it. This, along with simply being properly rested by getting efficient sleep (because of a reduction in stress, obtainable though better diet), will prevent a spiral such as this from developing.

If fatigue is consistently a problem for you and you crave stimulating foods such as cacao, and/or certain cooked foods, chances are your adrenals need nourishing back to health. The best way to do this is by recalibrating with basic whole, plant-based foods. A beneficial food for nourishing the adrenal glands as opposed to stimulating them is a root vegetable called maca. I include 2.5 grams of it in my blender drink each day to maintain strong adrenal function. ■



Brendan Brazier is a professional ironman triathlete, author of the best-selling book *The Thrive Diet*, and the creator of the award-winning Vega range of whole-food nutritional products. For more information, see BrendanBrazier.com and ThriveDiet.com. The book and the Vega range are available in the UK and Europe from fresh-network.com.