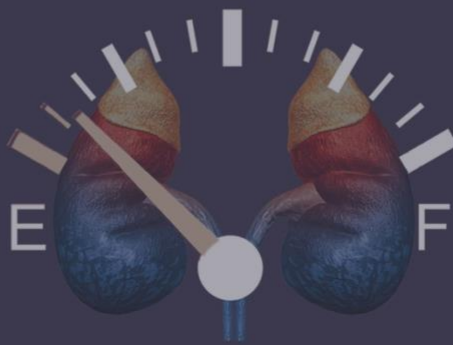


*Are You Running
On Empty?*



Author: Meri Jo Bierig, M.S., LSW, **Certified Whole Health Educator™***
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Learn more about Meri Jo and her work at: www.HealthUnlimitedInc.com

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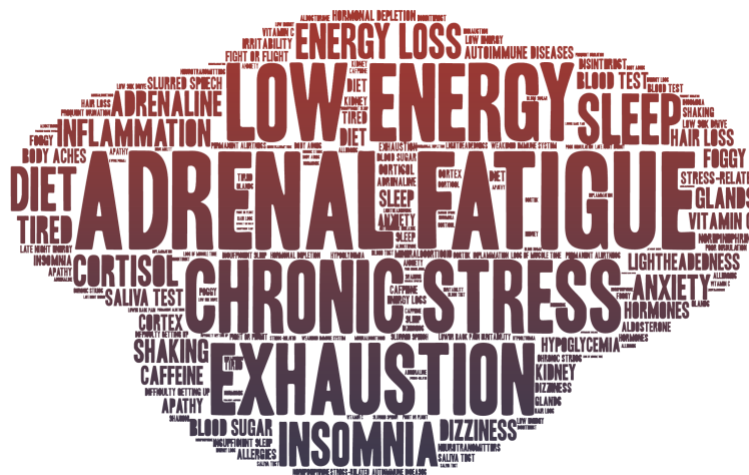
Please check with your physician before making any exercise or dietary changes.

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Introduction

My intention for this eBook is to help women who suffer from fatigue and lack the energy to go about their daily activities with ease and joy. This book will guide you in deciding what lifestyle changes you may want to make and give you clarity on your triggers for fatigue, which are different for every woman. The self-help options mentioned in this book don't need a prescription drug, and may encompass things like stress reduction, dietary changes, or changes to your home environment.

While there are various causes for fatigue, such as blood deficiencies, problems with the mitochondria (our energy factories), and low grade viral, fungal, and bacterial infections, this book will focus on how our stress response and the adrenal glands contribute to fatigue. It will serve as a starting point for many on their health journey....



Although most of us are familiar with the term “Adrenal Fatigue” and many of us have been diagnosed with it, the term is controversial both in conventional and Functional (holistic) medicine. For this reason, I prefer to use the term Adrenal Dysfunction, which includes adrenals that can be underactive or

overactive, and may be pumping out stress hormones the wrong time of day, the opposite of what nature intended.

What are some symptoms of Adrenal Dysfunction?

Rather than begin with some complex explanation, let's talk about how one would feel with this syndrome.

- Are you “tired but wired”, so tired that you can't sleep?
- Do you overreact to even the slightest irritation, and require caffeine to jumpstart your day?
- Is your fatigue not relieved by sleep?
- Do you crave salty and/or sugary foods, or stimulants?
- Is your female hormone cycle out of balance, such that you may miss work or family functions frequently?
- Are you too tired to exercise, even though you know it has benefits?

The Goals of This eBook Are As Follows:

- To introduce you to the **Five Aspects of Whole Health: the physical, emotional, nutritional, environmental and spiritual™©**, which is a functional approach to any health care issue and is central to my practice.
- To help readers understand that Adrenal Dysfunction impacts much more than fatigue in a woman's body, affecting hormones, the blood and circulatory system, digestion, and the immune system.
- To highlight the central role our emotions play in our stress level and resulting health issues.
- To give the reader some beginning strategies to help this condition, using simple and fun exercises in each of five aspects mentioned above.

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What Parts of The Body Are Involved?

Further on in this book I will explain some of the glands and body parts involved in Adrenal Dysfunction, which can include the adrenal and thyroid glands, the digestive tract, and the brain. The various systems in our bodies are so connected that you will see that we can't fix this by working on one body system alone.

Why Address Adrenal Dysfunction And Resulting Fatigue?

I have chosen to address this topic because I believe the majority of women that seek my services have, or have had, some degree of fatigue that affects their lives profoundly. Fatigue is the second most common visit to the primary care doctor, second to pain. Women today are facing increasing demands on their bodies, due to the stressful environment in which we live. We are not just talking about emotional stress, but factors like weather, a lingering infection like Candida, food allergies or hay fever, or living in a newly constructed home.

Also, many of us have learned negative coping strategies from our mothers and grandmothers, who taught us that our needs are less important than the needs of those around us.

Why You Will Want to Address This Now:

Many of you are in menopause or beginning to see the signs that it's coming. Many women are unaware that we need our adrenal glands to be healthy to have a smooth transition during menopause. During menopause, the adrenals are working harder than ever as they are a primary source of sex hormones, including estrogen, instead of the ovaries. Do you want this to be a normal process or become such a hassle that you will miss work or social outings? It doesn't need to be so. If we take care of our adrenal glands and our bodies in general, our lives will be more fulfilling.

Did You Know That the Health Of The Adrenals Affects These Body Functions?

- the body's regulation of salt and fluids in the blood
- metabolism of carbohydrates and regulation of blood sugar
- blood pressure and circulation
- the regulation of calcium and minerals in our bodies
- our immune system

Are you surprised to learn that the adrenal glands have an effect on so many body systems? **Understanding the wider implications of these tiny adrenal glands and the stress response is a priority for a woman's long-term health and longevity.**

Let's Get Started!

Ok, you know that you have this problem, and you don't feel you have the energy to make changes, even small ones.

So, what are the next steps?

Let me take you through a five-step process that I take all clients through, which looks at The Five Aspects of Whole Health: the physical, emotional, nutritional, environmental and spiritual, which are part of every health condition.

By going through this process, you will be practicing **Functional Medicine, which finds the root cause of our illness.** Your way of looking at health will be forever changed!

Let's go through the process together.

Here is where some serious detective work begins!

The Physical Aspects of Adrenal Dysfunction



The adrenals are two walnut sized glands that sit atop each kidney that are in charge of our body's response to stress. They are amazing little glands in that since the beginning of time, they have helped our bodies prepare for, and flee danger. They are part of the Endocrine System and are interrelated to other endocrine glands through chemical messengers (hormones) that travel through the blood. Other parts of the Endocrine System include the pineal, thyroid, parathyroid, pancreas, gonads, and pituitary glands.

The adrenal glands are made up of two parts: The adrenal cortex produces cortisol which reduces inflammation, to help with injury and pain. The cortex balances our body's salt and water, metabolizes carbohydrates, and regulates blood sugar. It also produces the sex hormone androgen and DHEA, known as "the youth hormone".

The adrenal medulla produces epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine (noradrenaline) and is in charge of speeding up our metabolism to help us flee danger. It tenses our muscles, increases our heart rate, and raises our blood pressure, and increases our breathing to get more oxygen to our lungs. All these actions are part of our body's Sympathetic Nervous System and the fight or flight response.

One of the most important things to understand about the stress response is that our bodies favor getting energy to our muscles to give us strength and speed to flee danger, and in order to do this precious energy is taken away from body processes like digestion, reproduction, and the immune systems. Glucose and simple forms of proteins and fats are extracted from our liver, fat cells, and the muscles that we are not using, to be directed to muscles being used to run from danger.

The problem with our modern lives is the stress response is the same if we are going to a meeting, a job interview, or spending time with family members we have issues with. Now, instead of our adrenals helping us flee physical harm, the adrenals are dealing with constant daily stress that our ancestors didn't have to cope with. You can see how these glands and the stress response weren't meant to be "On" all the time.

Our bodies are able to handle small amounts of stress hormones needed to get us past a danger. However, having Cortisol pumping through the body more often than not is actually **inflammatory** for the body, meaning that it causes redness, heat, and irritation to our joints, organs, and cells.

It's important to note again that stress hormones can decrease the function of your digestive, reproductive, circulatory, and immune systems. Think of the implications this has if you have been under long term stress. Other than fatigue, stress can be the cause of infertility, digestive issues, and high blood pressure.

SOME COMMON SYMPTOMS FOR ADRENAL DYSFUNCTION. HOW MANY DO YOU EXPERIENCE?

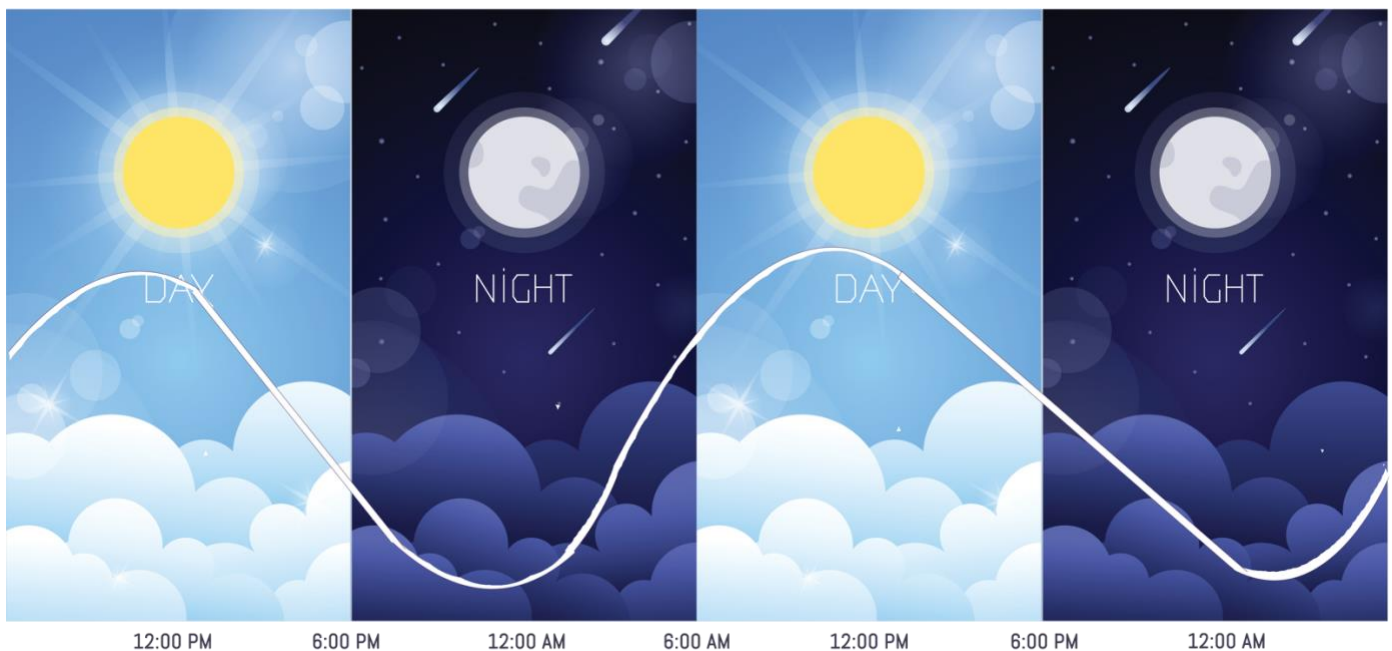
- general feeling of weakness or fatigue
- feeling stressed out
- high or low blood pressure
- hyperglycemia or hypoglycemia
- dizziness upon standing
- heart palpitations or increased heart rate
- cravings for sweet or salty foods
- poor memory or concentration
- weight gain, especially around the waist, or weight loss
- PMS or Menopausal symptoms
- Insomnia
- thinning hair
- reduced resistance to allergies, infection, and illness
- sodium retention or sodium loss
- anxiety
- muscle tension
- poor digestion and elimination
- headaches

OUR BODY'S INTERNAL CLOCK or CIRCADIAN RHYTHM

Our body has a circadian rhythm, that tells us it's time to sleep and fast during darkness, and time to be awake and eat during light hours. Our energy cycles follow a certain pattern and normally the adrenal glands secrete cortisol according to this pattern.

Below is a picture of what your cortisol levels should look like during the day. You can see how our energy peaks in the early morning to help us get started on our daily activities. By 5 pm however, our energy reserves are winding down in time to have a relaxing dinner and move a little slower.

CIRCADIAN RELEASE OF CORTISOL



Did you know that if we begin to rev up around 10 pm, it sends a message to our adrenal glands to start another round of energy or “second wind”? Does this apply to you?

In my practice I offer Saliva tests that measure your cortisol levels at different parts of the day, to see how your levels match the circadian rhythm.

If they don't, we have plenty of strategies to normalize your rhythm.

Low Thyroid and Its Effect On Energy

A discussion on fatigue would not be complete without a discussion of the thyroid gland. This gland is located in the throat area and in women, the most common glandular imbalance causing fatigue. The thyroid is in charge of the body's metabolism, and produces thyroxine, a hormone that's responsible for turning on the energy production in our cells. If the gland isn't producing enough thyroxine, symptoms may include fatigue, getting easily chilled, cold hands and feet, weight gain, dry skin, reproductive problems, hair loss and depression. Excess cortisol from stress can block the conversion and use of thyroid hormones.

Many physicians will treat the Thyroid gland and ignore the connection to the other endocrine glands, not helping the patient. The thyroid, adrenals, pituitary, and hypothalamus are all connected via hormone (chemical messengers) they send to each other through the blood. Glands will act to depress, stimulate, or antagonize the other. If one gland is down, it may affect the function of the others. It doesn't make sense to give a woman thyroid hormone without supporting the adrenals and addressing the causes of her stress.

It's important to explore the role of this gland with your health care practitioner and understand its role in fatigue.

Exercise 1:

Addressing The Physical Aspect

Consider your after-work activities:

- Do you exercise at night?
- Is nighttime the time to get into high gear and get things done at home? For many working moms and women in general, this can be a reality.
- Do you stay up past 10 pm, and give your body the signal to rev up its energy again? If this is you, your circadian rhythm may have a reverse curve, and be high after 5 pm. This contributes to sleep problems, weight gain, and daytime fatigue.

What can you do about this?

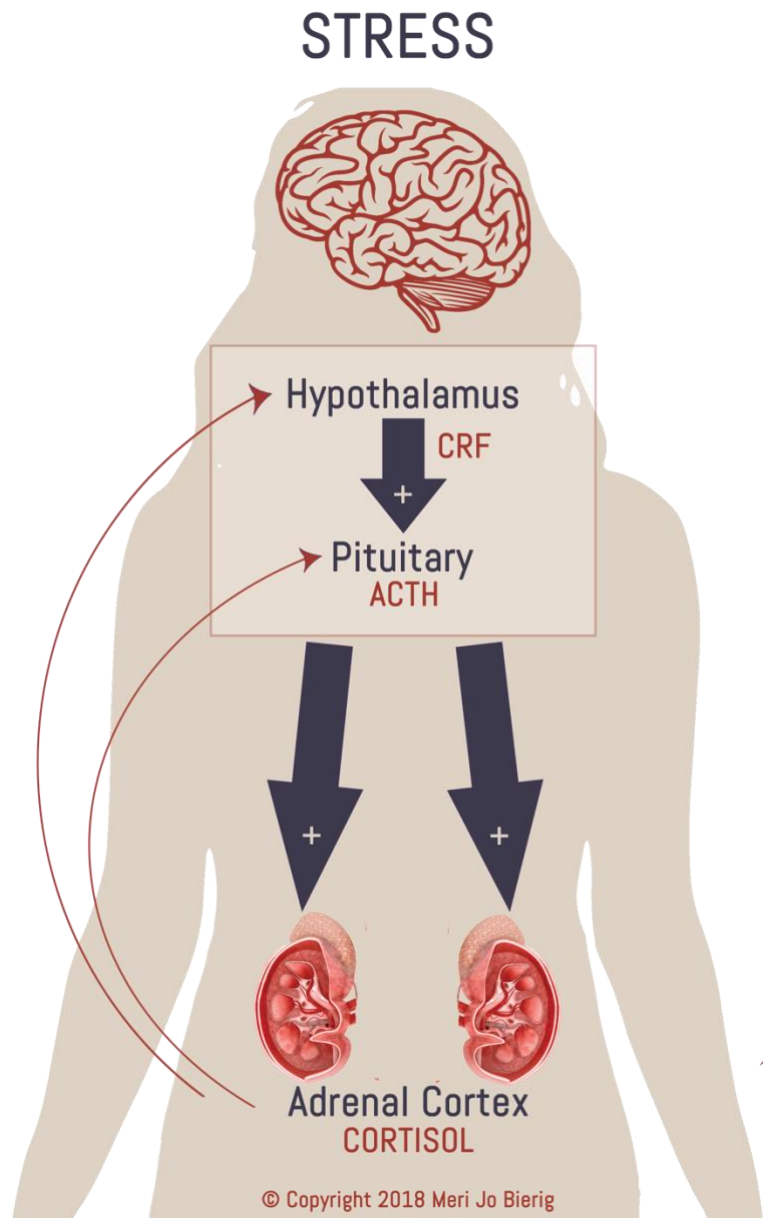
Work with your healthcare provider to come up with time management strategies so that you can restructure your time at home. It may involve setting new priorities and actually letting some things go, including our need for perfectionism. It may include delegating some functions to other family members or hiring someone to help with home cleaning. We are here to help you with these issues.

The Role of Emotions In Fatigue

To understand how emotions, affect stress and fatigue, let's take a look at the HPA axis, or Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal axis. This shows how a perceived danger (say an upcoming meeting at work) can start the stress response. Notice that there are three glands involved, and that the danger can be either physical or psychological in nature.

Unlike animals, we have the unique ability to anticipate an event as stressful, and by changing our perception of the event, we can change our response to it!

This gives us an idea how a stressful thought becomes a chemical molecule that impacts our body, by travelling through our blood stream. For example, if you're worried about a job interview, that thought makes your hypothalamus secrete CRF, which acts on the pituitary gland to stimulate the adrenals to get ready for a stressor.



Exercise 2:

Addressing the Emotional Aspect

Identify a negative, recurring thought that you frequently have. Most people are able to identify this without a problem. This requires you to be aware of your thoughts, catch that thought, and reframe it into a positive one. An example: Example- “This upcoming meeting is a positive thing. It’s helping me grow by preparing me to give a presentation, which will help my career.” You can keep a thought journal, or just be aware of negative thoughts for the next seven days to identify what emotional issues you need to work on.

Have you heard of the “Relaxation Response”? The term was coined by physician and researcher Dr. Herbert Benson. As humans, we can evoke a response that calms the sympathetic nervous system and “the fight or flight response” and invokes the parasympathetic nervous system which is in charge of repair, maintenance, and restoration of the digestion, breathing and heart rate. It actually changes our physical and emotional response to stress. No single method of invoking this response works for everyone.

An easy exercise to help you feel the relaxation response is to visit a health food store and visit their essential oils section. Essential oils affect the hypothalamus, the little organ we spoke of that can initiate the stress response. The blood vessels in our lungs take up the oils and circulate them through the body and to the brain. Certain oils/aromas can trigger positive memories and feelings of well-being, initiating the Relaxation Response. Do you have a favorite scent?

Essential oils I recommend for relaxation are Lavender, Chamomile, Ylang-Ylang, Bergamot, and Patchouli. These can be put in a spritzer bottle and used around the home; put on a cotton ball and carried with you in a small container; or applied to the skin via a “carrier oil” like Jojoba Oil.

Essential oils should not be applied directly to the skin as they may cause irritation. If you are pregnant or have a serious health condition, always consult your medical practitioner before using an essential oil.

The Role of Our Environment

Let's think of our environment as the place we work, our community, our neighborhood, our home, and the planet Earth in general. That encompasses a lot of potential stressors! Keep in mind we are constantly exposed to household chemicals, environmental chemicals like car exhaust, and chemicals in our food.

I would like to discuss two common examples of how our environment affects us. We all remember having a string of cold days here in New England, where it's too cold to exercise outside or even walk to the car.

This causes our bodies to feel stress. It is the same for those of you that live in very hot environments, like Arizona in certain months of the year. You may say that weather is not your top stressor. However, environment can add to the stress you are feeling from other sources, helping to increase the stress load on your body.

Another stressor that I hear from women is coming home to a cluttered house. We come home after a long hard day and we just want to relax. But all around us is clutter, just begging to be organized and put away. I know very few women that can compartmentalize that and sit down and relax. We tend to feel guilty about it and the stress can even be under our radar, meaning that we don't realize how much of an impact this has on our health. We feel like we are on a treadmill and we'll never get the clutter cleaned up. Did you ever think of that as a source of stress?

Exercise 3:

Addressing the Environmental Aspect

How do you feel when you enter your home, coming home from work?

Is it a feeling of “Ah, this is my sanctuary”, or, “Wow, I feel more stress now than when I was at work?”

You may want to relax and journal about this.

The Role Of Nutrition In Fatigue

Stress has been described as an anti-nutrient, something that robs our bodies of the vitamins and minerals we would otherwise absorb from our foods.

This happens because the stress response can prevent nutrient absorption, or make us need higher amounts of nutrients, like B complex vitamins and vitamin C. During the stress response, oxygen rich blood to the stomach and gut is diverted, to deliver energy to the muscles that are involved in the stressful event.

Since the adrenals have an impact on blood sugar regulation, carbohydrate metabolism, and regulation of fluids and sodium, it's not hard to imagine that adrenal dysfunction and stress can play a role in the foods we chose every day. In times of stress we get comfort from foods high in sugar, carbohydrates, and fats.

It's ironic that the "pick me ups" many of us reach for like caffeine and sodas both increase adrenaline and cortisol and end up stressing the adrenals even more. Caffeine constricts blood vessels and increases your heart rate, so its effect is similar to the stress response. It's never recommended to cut these stimulants cold turkey, so you may want to work with your health care provider to come up with a plan to wean yourself off stimulants gradually to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Many people turn to alcohol to lessen the affects of stress, but like caffeine, alcohol actually worsens stress. Alcohol is a diuretic, which means it causes the body to lose water, possibly causing dehydration. Having several drinks can make cortisol levels rise if the body perceives dehydration. Alcohol can also impair sleep, causing more nighttime awakenings and limiting restorative sleep. It may help to limit alcohol to one drink per day.

“The Zone Diet” by Dr. Barry Sears is not really a diet at all, but a way of eating that keeps blood sugar balanced for 4 hours after your meal. Nutrition that balances the blood sugars and other hormones is optimal for those with fatigue. Dr. Sears is a former research scientist and Nobel Prize winner, who extensively studied the hormonal effects of foods. He recommends three meals per day and two snacks, all of which are balanced with 1/3 lean protein, 2/3 low glycemic, colorful veggies, and lesser amounts of legumes and fruits. Include a dash of healthy fats from olive oil, avocado, and nuts. Low glycemic foods are low in carbohydrates and sugars and make the body’s blood sugar rise slowly, instead of spiking as with sugary snacks.

Plan a protein snack for the part of the day when your energy wanes in the late afternoon. This slump is common as our cortisol levels can be low that time of day. It’s good to vary the type of snack to prevent food allergies. Include protein and complex carbs, or something like nuts that contains both protein and good quality fats. Some examples are: healthy nitrite and sugar free lunchmeats of various kinds, filled with a slice of cheese or salad veggies, various kinds of raw nuts and an apple, several slices of cheese with whole grain crackers, a protein drink from whey or vegetable protein powder with low glycemic fruits like berries. Getting a large salad for lunch with protein and eating the other half later in the day may work for some.

If you are on a special diet and can’t eat meat or dairy, seek the help of a nutrition educator to come up with a diet to support your adrenal health.

Exercise 4:

Addressing The Nutritional Aspect

Can you come up with two new snacks to help you with that energy slump around 3 pm using the guidelines above?

Could Spirituality Have A Role In Fatigue?

Yes it can. Spirituality is a very personal experience. What does it mean to you? For some, it means a connection to a higher power, something that connects us humans to a greater purpose and meaning. Some experience it by doing yoga, being out in nature, running, or reading a favorite prayer book. Having a belief system gives your life purpose and value. Do you practice visualizations, or positive affirmations? Are you grateful for the good things in your life and regularly give thanks for those things?

Feelings of trust, or lack of trust (fear) affects our health. If we live in trust, we arise each day believing that the universe will provide whatever we need that day on our journey. We believe that somehow things always work out for the best. People show up in our lives at the right time and place to provide the help we need.

Living in fear, we don't expect good things to happen. We may feel that there's not enough wealth, health, or fun to go around. Although fearful emotions set off the stress response in our bodies, we've learned that we have some control over this process by being aware of our thoughts moment to moment.

Exercise 5:

Addressing The Spiritual Aspect

- What type of spiritual practice do you have, or would you have, if you had time?
- What practices do your friends have that seem to work for them?
- What qualities does your friend/family member have as a result of their spiritual practice?

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS TO REMEMBER

- Fatigue has many causes and can take years to create. We cannot find a quick cure. Making small changes in our daily habits and giving ourselves permission to handle enough changes that are comfortable for us will work well. Having a health professional that can motivate you can make all the difference.
- Fatigue, like every other physical condition, requires exploration of The Five Aspects of Whole Health, which are physical, emotional, environmental, nutritional, and spiritual.
- Our emotional health has a direct impact on our stress level and resulting physical issues that stem from stress. Improving our health means getting help with the emotional issues we are experiencing.

My role with clients experiencing fatigue is to provide a supportive environment for you to discover your triggers, and to help you come up with an action plan that reflects your lifestyle, belief system and motivation level.

I welcome your feedback on this eBook regarding how it was helpful to you. I invite you to take the next step and schedule a free consult online, so we can get to know each other.

ABOUT MERI JO

My study of natural therapies began in 1994 when I experienced food and environmental allergies, Candida, and chemical sensitivities. During this time my children were ages three and six, so it was not an ideal time to be dealing with health issues.



I believe that my health problems came about from being on antibiotics for twenty plus years, for cystic acne. These drugs left their mark on my digestion and gut health. My medical doctor told me that I had the beginnings of an autoimmune disease and would probably never regain my health. I remember feelings of hopelessness, as various doctors offered me no viable solutions.

I knew I could not give up and began researching and experiencing many holistic therapies to get well. I tried acupuncture, Craniosacral Therapy, massage, meditation, yoga, and various forms of energy healing. I learned the healing power of nutrition and the importance of the mind-body connection. As my health slowly improved, I was convinced that natural therapies could be integrated with traditional health care practices.

I loved researching health care issues and became a source of information for my friends and family. This trying time in my life became the foundation for the future business I was to create.

I believe in our traditional health care system, but feel it is best for acute care like hip replacements, broken bones, and prescribing drugs when lifestyle changes aren't enough. Traditional health care is not helpful for finding the root cause of an illness, or prescribing lifestyle changes like better nutrition and stress reduction that can have big impacts on our health.

I feel called to help busy women with their health issues, so that they can benefit from the research that's taken me years to do. I understand the dynamics of how and why women can be programmed to take care of everyone other than themselves and encourage my clients to take time for self-care and make their needs a priority.

I am grateful to the National Institute of Whole Health (NIWH) for turning my passion for health research into a career. I completed my studies there in 2006, and recently completed my re-certification as a **Whole Health Educator™©**.

My mission is to provide a calm, relaxed, and caring space for women to reflect on the causes of their health issues. I practice functional medicine, and together we explore **The Five Aspects of Whole Health: the physical, emotional, nutritional, environmental and spiritual™©** causes of a health problem. At times I feel like a medical detective, helping women connect the dots between their various symptoms and their current health status.

As for my personal life, I'm happiest when I'm in the great outdoors hiking, biking on the rail trails, walking, or being around animals of all kinds. I love gardening and have a green thumb when it comes to flowers and houseplants. The activities that replenish me include yoga, meditation, reading historical novels and keeping up on current events.

Last but not least, I am the mother of two grown children who live and work in the Boston area.

Wishing you vibrant health,

Meri Jo

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