

RE/FRAMING ADDICT/ION

HORMONES – secreted by glands and circulated throughout the body with the blood. Released through the adrenal glands, our primary hormones related to stress are:

- **Cortisol**
- **Adrenalin**
- **Noradrenalin**

NEUROTRANSMITTERS – produced by the brain and in the intestinal tract. Certain chemical messengers can act as both hormone and neurotransmitters. Addictive substances produce their specific effects on the brain by altering the activity of neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters involved in addiction include:

- **Dopamine (most important!)**
- **GABA**
- **Acetylcholine**
- **Serotonin**
- **Epinephrine/Norepinephrine**
- **Glutamate**
- **Endorphins and Enkephalins**
- **Aspartate**

People with addictions have a lower threshold for stress and can be triggered to relapse, or partake in the addictive behaviour, by minor incidences. These people have an overactive stress response, resulting in consistently high levels of cortisol.

HIGH CORTISOL

- **less sleep**
- **anxiety**
- **agitation**
- **elevated heart beat**
- **elevated blood pressure**
- **mood swings**

People with HIGH CORTISOL seek substances that act as depressants, or “downers” to counteract the imbalance, including:

- **sedatives**
- **alcohol**
- **tranquilizers**
- **sleeping pills**
- **certain strains of marijuana**

After an extended period of time operating with high levels of cortisol, it is common for the body to experience what we often call “burn out”. Chemically, cortisol levels become much lower than average, resulting in an underactive stress response, or the inability to react at all, to any given stress.

People with LOW CORTISOL seek substances that act as stimulants, or “uppers including:

- **coffee**
- **speed**
- **sugar**
- **chocolate**
- **crystal meth**
- **cocaine**
- **cigarettes**
- **“energy” drinks**

When our cortisol levels are out of whack, we refer to this as an adrenal imbalance. Causes of adrenal imbalance include what you might suspect: stress, overexertion, too much work and not enough play, imbalanced breathing, imbalanced diet and nutritional deficiencies, food sensitivities, inadequate water and salt intake, excess alcohol, smoking, imbalanced exercise (too much or too little), shift work, emotional trauma and/or abuse, overwhelming shock, death of a loved one, compounding grief, negative thought patterns and emotions, imbalances in the chakras.