

# What Are Adaptogens?

Michael Murray, ND



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**Rebekah Kelley:** Welcome to the Humanized podcast, all about personalizing your health. I'm your host, Rebekah Kelley, and today we'll be discussing What Are Adaptogens, with Dr. Michael Murray. Before I introduce Dr. Murray, I want to remind everyone to subscribe and get all of our variety of casts in audio, video and transcription at [HumanizedHealth.com](http://HumanizedHealth.com). I'd also like to thank our lead sponsor, Village Green Apothecary, at [MyVillageGreen.com](http://MyVillageGreen.com).

A little bit about Dr. Murray. He is one of the world's leading authorities on natural medicine. He's dedicated his life to educating physicians, patients and the general public on the tremendous healing power of nature. Dr. Murray has published over 300 books, written numerous articles for major publications, and has appeared on hundreds of radio and TV programs. Dr. Murray is a graduate, former faculty member, and serves on the Board of Regents at Bastyr University in Seattle, Washington.

We're so happy to have you here.

**Michael Murray:** It's my pleasure.

**Rebekah Kelley:** So we're talking about, What Are Adaptogens? What are some common examples?

**Michael Murray:** Well, common examples include the ginsengs, Siberian and Chinese ginseng, Rhodiola, ashwagandha and maca.

**Rebekah Kelley:** And, what health benefits do adaptogens produce?

**Michael Murray:** Well let's first of all define what is an adaptogen. Adaptogens have been used historically across the globe, different adaptogens based upon what was growing there. But the idea is that these are a plant that will be able to improve our ability to withstand stress and enhance our mental, physical and sexual performance. So these are great energy boosters, are great for enhancing all sorts of different biological processes.

So, I've given you some examples. What we know now about adaptogens is that they work very interestingly on stress mechanisms and in particular, in supporting our adrenal glands. And our adrenal glands are these two glands that sit on top of each kidney and they're responsible for secreting a lot of the hormones. Most people are familiar with adrenaline. That's one of its key hormones, and it plays a big role in the fight-or-flight response. The stress response in all of these plants that I just mentioned, the ginsengs, Rhodiola, ashwagandha, maca, they all seem to impart some health benefits to the adrenal glands.

**Rebekah Kelley:** Awesome. So which adaptogen should we choose to use, or should I use, or should we use, in general?

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**Michael Murray:** Yeah, it really depends on a few different things. There's a lot of overlap, but if we try to dial in specific adaptogens based upon a person's age or sex, or the degree of stress they're dealing with, we can do that.

I'm really quite impressed with the research on ashwagandha and in particular, there are two high quality extracts. One is called Sensoril and the other is called KSM-66. And, either one of these is showing really good effects on helping us deal with stress, and exert some additional benefits. I like ashwagandha for its effects on brain health, in particular. It may have a role in kind of preventing some of the age-related decline in mental function and the low mood that we often see as people get older. So I really like ashwagandha for people that are dealing with a lot of stress, anxiety, maybe some sleep issues, and they're getting up there in age. I really, really like ashwagandha for the older population. And by older, I mean my age, anything 60 plus.

**Rebekah Kelley:** So what are some other adaptogens and how would they affect our health and wellness?

**Michael Murray:** The ginsengs are probably the most well-known adaptogens, and there's a lot of good science on either Chinese or Siberian ginseng. Chinese, or Panax ginseng, I think is a bit stronger and it has energy enhancing abilities. So I like to use it when people are really debilitated, maybe they're coming out of a long illness or they've really been dealing with stress over a long period of time, and it's just pretty much exhausted their adrenals, really kind of decimated their physiology. I think that's a great indication for Panax ginseng. It's very uplifting and has some good energy promoting activity. I think it's really good for athletes, men in particular, with a lot of yang energy. You know, a lot of times they can take subtler plant adaptogens and really not feel any punch. We give those guys, and some women that need that extra punch, we give them the Panax ginseng and they really can feel the energy enhancement and the improved performance. Siberian ginseng is a little gentler than Panax ginseng, so I generally like it more for women than Panax ginseng. And it too has some really good stress-relieving and energy-enhancing effects.

There's a couple other adaptogens that I'll get to as well, to give you some subtle differentiations. Rhodiola, or arctic root, has a lot of good data as kind of a mood elevating adaptogen. So it has the ability to help with anxiety, but it's really a mood elevator, so it would be my choice in someone who is really feeling blue and really needed a boost in their mood, as well as their energy and dealing with stress.

So those are some of the big ones. And I really want to spend a lot of time talking about maca because I think maca is an adaptogen that we all can benefit from on a regular basis. Maca is kind of newer to the stage compared to these other plant medicines, but it's been a big part of medicine in Peru – that's where maca is grown. It's a member of the cabbage family or broccoli family, and it looks a lot like a turnip and comes in a lot of different colors – black, red and yellow – and I like to think of maca as kind of a concentrated source of all those chemicals that

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we know are a benefit that are found in kale and cabbage and broccoli and Brussels sprouts. Maca has all those benefits, and more. It helps the entire endocrine system, our hormonal system. It has been shown to basically improve body processes and it does so primarily through its effects on the pituitary, the adrenals, the thyroids, the ovaries, the testes, the pineal gland. So some of the benefits that we see, we see improved detoxification – you see that with all the cabbage family vegetables – we see higher energy levels.

The historical aspects of maca are quite interesting. It has a lot of folklore attached to it. It was used in the native culture for thousands of years and it has a storied history. So it has some incredible effects on boosting fertility and sexual function, has some effects on improving sleep and mood as well. I really like maca for just about everybody. And I think it provides many of the benefits that we see from traditional adaptogens – ashwagandha, the ginsengs and Rhodiola – but you add to that all of these benefits that we know that these cabbage family vegetables have, and that includes not only detoxification and anti-cancer effects, but some really interesting effects on reproductive function. And maca has been shown to have some very interesting effects on women. Research on menopausal women using maca shows that maca can actually increase the woman's own production of estrogen. And so it can basically prolong their reproductive life and delay some of the symptoms and aspects of menopause. After menopause, we still see some benefit with maca. It can stimulate estrogen, not to the same level that you would see in a woman of reproductive age, but we see an increase in estrogen to a level that can reduce some of the symptoms like hot flashes, insomnia, depression, irritability, nervousness and diminished concentration. It also lowers cortisol level, and that's the stress hormone.

That's one of the things that we see with all of these adaptogens, Rebekah, and I think that that's not only important and in fighting stress. Cortisol is one of the few hormones that actually increases as we get older, and it has a ravaging effect on our brain, our muscle mass, our bone mass. So if we can keep cortisol levels lower as we get older, we can really impact preventing those very serious consequences of aging – osteoporosis, dementia, memory loss, loss of muscle mass, low immune function, depression, insomnia. These are all linked to excess cortisol. So if we can keep those cortisol levels by using the adaptogens and all the adaptogens that have that effect that I really like... I really like maca for most people.

**Rebekah Kelley:** It sounds like a super antigen, the maca.

**Michael Murray:** It's a true superfood. And it comes in a variety of different forms. You can get raw maca powder, and the dosage there is three to six grams per day. So it's not a huge dose compared to a lot of super foods, but it is bitter. You can add it to smoothies, to mask it a bit, but most of the time I'm recommending using some sort of organic, super strength maca extract. The product I have most familiarity with is the product from Natural Factors, it's called Organic MacaRich, and it contains a maca with a little bit of ginseng in there. It's produced in a kind of a traditional way. Maca is a root vegetable, has a lot of starch, so what is done first is they gelatinize the root, which means they remove all of the starch. This alone concentrates the

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active compounds. And when you use a concentrated, gelatinized maca, the dose is 1000 to 2000 milligrams per day. So it's easy to take it in a capsule or tablet.

**Rebekah Kelley:** Wow. I'm definitely going to be adding that to my diet, for sure. Thanks, Dr. Murray, those are really valuable insights. Dr. Murray can be found [www.DrMurray.com](http://www.DrMurray.com). Let me remind you to subscribe and get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts and transcriptions from all of our thought leaders on personalized health at [HumanizedHealth.com](http://HumanizedHealth.com).