# Experts warn against the unscientific cortisol detox trend popular online



Psychologists and medical experts are addressing a growing trend in the online wellness community that promotes the idea of a “cortisol detox” as a remedy for stress, fatigue, and various health issues. This concept is gaining traction on social media platforms, where influencers often recommend detox programs featuring meditation, exposure to sunlight, dietary adjustments, specific supplements such as ginseng, and even ice baths. However, specialists warn that this trend may be based on misunderstandings about the hormone cortisol and its essential role in the body.

Cortisol, produced by the adrenal glands, is the primary stress hormone responsible for regulating important functions including blood pressure and metabolism. Professor Creswell Eastman, an endocrinologist and clinical professor at the University of Sydney, explained that cortisol is an “essential hormone for life” and that its increase during stressful situations is a natural, protective response. “It’s our physiological response to the flight and fight mechanism, ensuring that we can survive some threat to our wellbeing. That’s why we make cortisol,” he said. Professor Eastman noted that only rare conditions such as Cushing’s disease or Cushing’s syndrome, the latter caused by excessive cortisol-like medication, result in harmful excess cortisol levels. There is “no way you can detox from that,” he added.

Psychologist Carly Dober highlighted a problematic aspect of the cortisol detox narrative, stating that it falsely frames cortisol as a dangerous chemical to eliminate. “It sounds like an easy fix to whatever issues might be happening in your life to target one particular chemical [but] the framing of this as a dangerous chemical is really problematic because it’s necessary,” she said. Dober pointed out that some detox recommendations, like cold water immersion therapy, could pose risks, particularly to individuals with pre-existing heart conditions. She underscored that cortisol levels themselves cannot be accurately quantified by the average person and that the focus should instead be on managing stress healthily over time.

The concept of stress itself was addressed by both experts, who emphasised that a “Goldilocks” amount of stress—neither excessive nor absent—is necessary for human growth, learning, and thriving. Chronic stress lasting longer than three months does negatively impact health, affecting wellbeing and immune function, but short-term stress is an important physiological experience.

Professor Karena Burke, head of the school of psychology at the University of Wollongong, said that while some elements of cortisol detox programs—such as improved diet, stress management techniques, and increased social interaction—can be beneficial, the focus should be on sustained lifestyle changes rather than quick fixes. She advised those experiencing stress to try relaxation techniques including deep breathing and journaling, along with regular physical activity whether indoors or outdoors, and maintaining good sleep hygiene.

Both experts strongly recommend consulting healthcare professionals like GPs, endocrinologists, psychologists, or counsellors when dealing with significant stress or considering substantial lifestyle changes. An individualised approach is essential as different methods work for different people.

The Guardian is reporting that the popular narrative around cortisol detox in online wellness spaces oversimplifies and misrepresents the complex biological role of cortisol. Understanding cortisol’s vital functions and focusing on comprehensive, sustainable lifestyle modifications is advocated by health professionals over trending detox programmes promising quick relief.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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