

PRINT-Fad or Fact? The truth about the viral “Cortisol Cocktail”

Surveys show fewer young adults are drinking alcohol — a 10-point drop in 18- to 34-year-olds over the past 20 years — and many are turning to trendy non-alcoholic drinks they believe boost health. The latest? A “cortisol cocktail,” now making waves on social media.

OSF HealthCare gastroenterologist Omar Khokhar, MD, says it’s a homemade drink that includes a few main ingredients.

“It’s oranges, coconut water and salt. It can be derivatives of each one of those ingredients but that’s sort of the nuts and bolts of it. The thought process is that each one of those ingredients helps with the electrolyte balance in your body once you ingest this mocktail.”

The drink is designed to promote development of cortisol, a stress hormone that influences several systems in the body.

“Cortisol is one of many chemicals produced by a small gland on top of your kidney called the adrenal gland. And so, cortisol plays a key role in metabolism, immune function, blood-sugar metabolism and so any disruption in your cortisol metabolism can have a downstream effect in other parts of your body leading to potential health issues.”

The drink claims to help with something influencers have labeled “adrenal fatigue” and weight loss by increasing cortisol. But here’s the catch — Dr. Khokhar says the science doesn’t back it up.

“Adrenal fatigue has been debunked in 2016 by a meta-analysis, and it is not a true condition. The other pertinent point that people should know is that taking a cortisol mocktail does not in any way shape or form alter your cortisol levels. It has no impact on producing more cortisol or reducing cortisol levels in any way.”

There is a condition known as adrenal insufficiency, which is a serious medical condition in which the adrenal glands fail to produce enough cortisol. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, low blood pressure, low blood sugar and extreme fatigue. Dr. Khokhar says if you experience these symptoms, see a doctor right away.

If you want to improve cortisol levels in a meaningful way, Dr. Khokhar suggests other approaches.

“There are things that are much more data-driven that can help with that. That includes getting seven or eight hours of sleep. That includes reducing your stress through meditation or other practices.” He also suggests, “That includes eating a healthy diet. Those are things that are maybe more difficult to do but they’ve been shown to improve cortisol levels, whether they’re high or low.” (

Dr. Khokhar says a cortisol cocktail as its being touted likely won’t harm you if you don’t have an underlying condition such as diabetes or high blood pressure that could be impacted by a sugary, salty drink.

On its own, he says coconut water has health benefits because it has electrolytes and hydrating properties. So, it can help with rehydration, especially after exercise or illness, and could also support heart health, blood sugar management, and digestive health.

Additionally, coconut water and orange juice are a good source of Vitamin C and other antioxidants so benefits worth sipping, even if cortisol isn't part of the picture.