

A SABLE + SAND PROTOCOL

The Adaptogen Protocol

Twelve weeks. Three phases.
Built from the evidence.

Researched. Practical. Honest.

SECTION 01

Before you begin

Adaptogens do not work like caffeine. They raise the threshold at which stress tips into dysfunction. That takes time, consistency, and the right order of introduction.

What this Protocol is

A twelve week plan in three phases. Foundation (weeks one to four): lifestyle work first. A stress audit, sleep hygiene practice, and movement as a non-supplement adaptogen, before ashwagandha enters. Expand (weeks five to eight): layer in rhodiola, reishi, and holy basil one at a time, each week adds one new adaptogen onto a baseline that is already calmer. Sustain (weeks nine to twelve): add maca and lion's mane for energy and cognition, build the personalised stack, and decide what stays, what cycles, and what drops.

Who it is for

Women aged 28 to 50 living under sustained stress. The person whose tiredness does not lift after a weekend away. Whose anxiety arrives before the trigger. Whose sleep is light and whose recovery from a hard week takes longer than it used to. The cohort whose blood tests come back normal but whose body does not feel that way. Anyone who has been told to 'just manage stress better' and left without a practical structure for doing so.

Who it is not for

Anyone with a diagnosed endocrine condition, autoimmune disease, or thyroid disorder should work with their clinician before adding adaptogens. Some adaptogens modulate immune and hormonal pathways and interact with certain medications. Pregnancy and breastfeeding require clinician input on any new supplementation. This Protocol is educational and is not a substitute for medical care.

What is included

The full Protocol PDF you are reading. A seven day quick start companion so you can begin tomorrow morning without waiting for the full twelve weeks to feel like the right moment. A printable symptom tracker with twelve stress and resilience markers scored weekly. Brand free supplement guidance with the forms and doses the trials actually used.

How long it takes

Twelve weeks. Most people notice shifts in sleep quality and morning energy within the first two weeks on the lifestyle work alone. The adaptogen stack builds across phases two and three. The HPA axis is a slow system; the most meaningful changes in stress tolerance and recovery show up at eight to twelve weeks of consistent practice.

Read it once before you start. Then return to week one and follow the structure week by week.

SECTION 02

The science in one page

Adaptogens do not sedate and they do not stimulate. They modulate. That is what makes them different from every other category in the supplement aisle.

The stress response lives in the HPA axis: the hypothalamus, the pituitary gland, and the adrenal glands. When the brain perceives a threat, the hypothalamus fires corticotropin releasing hormone, the pituitary releases ACTH, and the adrenals produce cortisol. In a well-regulated system, cortisol peaks, does its job, and falls. In a chronically stressed system, the signal stays high, the adrenals keep producing, and the downstream effects accumulate: disrupted sleep, blunted immunity, impaired cognition, flattened mood, accelerated ageing at the cellular level.

What adaptogens do is raise the threshold at which that cascade tips into dysfunction. They do not stop the cortisol response; the cortisol response is necessary. They modulate the sensitivity of the system so that the same stressor produces a smaller, shorter spike and a faster return to baseline. The mechanism is not fully mapped in every case, but the strongest evidence points to effects on glucocorticoid receptor sensitivity, heat shock protein expression, and nitric oxide signalling at the hypothalamic level.

Ashwagandha is the best studied adaptogen and the one this Protocol introduces first. Its primary active compounds are withanolides, a class of steroidal lactones found in high concentration in the root. Withanolide A in particular has been shown to modulate the cortisol feedback loop directly, reduce serum cortisol in randomised controlled trials, and improve scores on validated stress and anxiety rating scales within four to eight weeks. The KSM-66 extract standardises to a minimum 5 percent withanolides, which is the concentration used in the strongest trials.

Why stacking matters: different adaptogens act on different arms of the stress response. Rhodiola acts primarily on the sympathetic nervous system and cognitive fatigue. Reishi acts on the immune modulation and sleep architecture pathways. Holy basil (tulsi) modulates cortisol via a different enzymatic pathway from ashwagandha. Maca works on energy and hormonal balance. Lion's mane stimulates nerve growth factor and improves cognitive resilience. None of them, alone, addresses the full picture. Stacked in the right order onto a lifestyle foundation that is already calmer, they compound.

The trap is reaching for the stack first and the lifestyle work never. Adaptogens layered onto disrupted sleep, high caffeine, and no movement are fighting the tide. The Protocol does the lifestyle work in weeks one to three precisely so that the adaptogens introduced in week four have a calmer baseline to work on. That is not a delay; it is the reason the Protocol works.

WEEK 1 . PHASE 1

Stress audit and symptom baseline

This week

Score where you start. Map the stressors before you try to change them.

What you do

The first week of the Protocol is an audit, not an intervention. Before you change anything, you map the terrain: your stress signals, your sleep baseline, your caffeine and alcohol patterns, and your current symptom scores. The symptom tracker at the back of the full Protocol gives you the scoring framework. Your week one scores are your baseline; everything the Protocol does is measured against them.

Continued in the full Protocol

The full Protocol contains all twelve weeks across three phases, plus the supplement card for all six adaptogens, a printable symptom tracker with twelve resilience markers, and the seven day quick start companion so you can begin tomorrow morning.

Available at sableandsand.com/protocols/adaptogen-protocol. One payment of nineteen pounds. Lifetime updates included.