

enough to leave the sedans listed above far behind. Providing sporty handling requires sacrificing a measure of comfort, however—the ride isn't quite as smooth as that of many other full-size sedans.



Caption

Fuel economy: 20 mpg city/29 highway for the V6 (17mpg/26 for the V8). **Price:** From \$34,200 (from \$45,500 for the V8).

Infiniti M, like the Hyundai Genesis, successfully combines the comfort, luxury and spaciousness of a full-size sedan with the driving excitement of a sporty car. The M's exterior styling is striking...



Caption

...its interior spacious, well-equipped and very upscale. This rear-wheel-drive car is a worthy rival to famed European sedans such as the BMW 5 Series and Mercedes-Benz E-Class—only at a lower price. Drivers who appreciate the smooth glide of a typical full-size sedan might find the M's ride a bit firm for their tastes—other drivers will love the sharp handling.

The base model M's 3.7-liter V6 produces 330 hp, while the optional 5.6-liter V8 offers 420 hp. A new hybrid 3.5-liter V6 delivers 360 hp.

Fuel economy: 18 mpg city/26 highway for the base model (27 mpg/32 for the hybrid, 16 mpg/24 for the V8). **Price:** From \$47,700 for the base model (from \$53,700 for the hybrid, from \$59,200 for the V8). □

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The Surprising Cause of Fatigue Even Doctors Overlook

Theodore C. Friedman, MD, PhD

Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science

Don't expect a quick solution, or even an accurate diagnosis, if you're suffering from fatigue. You might have to see a lot of experts before you get the right answer.

Reason: Even though doctors check for cortisol deficiency as a sign of *adrenal insufficiency*, also known as *Addison's disease*, a common cause of fatigue, they may neglect to investigate the one hormone that is an early indicator of the disease.

The adrenal glands, located just above the kidneys, produce more than 50 hormones, including *cortisol* (the "stress" hormone) and *aldosterone* (which maintains the body's sodium balance). Cortisol levels often are tested because low levels indicate Addison's disease and cortisol deficiency can be life-threatening while low aldosterone usually is not. But it could be a low level of aldosterone that is making you tired...

WARNING SIGNS

If you have low aldosterone, fatigue probably will be the first symptom—but it might take months before you recognize it. *Reason:* Fatigue and other symptoms come on gradually. It's common for patients to get accustomed to how they feel.

Helpful: Measure your blood pressure at home if you're experiencing persistent fatigue. The natural increase in blood pressure that occurs in the doctor's office, known as "white-coat hypertension," can give a reading that's

artificially high. If you have low aldosterone, your blood pressure could be as low as 90/60. (Normal is about 120/80.)

Another key symptom of low aldosterone is the intense craving for salt. Patients with low aldosterone lose excessive amounts of sodium in urine.

Symptoms of LOW ALDOSTERONE

- Fatigue
- Dizziness on standing
- Brain Fog
- Low Blood Pressure
- Dehydration
- Palpitations
- Salt Craving

WHAT HAPPENS

Addison's disease is caused by damage to the outer layer of the adrenal glands. The damage usually is caused when the immune system "mis-

takenly" attacks the glands. If left untreated, Addison's disease can be life threatening.

Important: If you are suffering from persistent fatigue and have other symptoms of low aldosterone, ask your doctor to test for aldosterone as well as cortisol. Aldosterone that measures five ng/dL or lower could be causing your symptoms even if your cortisol is normal. Aldosterone can be measured with a standard blood test.

HOW TO TREAT IT

If you have low aldosterone...

Eat more salt. Patients with low aldosterone and fatigue often feel >>

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Theodore C. Friedman, MD, PhD, professor of medicine, chair of the department of internal medicine, chief of the division of endocrinology, metabolism and molecular medicine and endowed professor of cardio-metabolic medicine at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, Los Angeles. www.GoodHormoneHealth.com



The Right Way to Compost

Teri Dunn Chace

Composting converts household garbage into a valuable addition to soil. It also can reduce the amount of trash that you throw away, saving you money if you live in a town that charges a per-trash-bag fee.

But many people don't compost properly—and then it creates bad odors and attracts pests. How to do it right...

1. Buy a compost bin and a large airtight plastic container. Black plastic compost bins can be purchased from home centers or garden shops for \$50 to \$150. Some municipalities sell them for even less to encourage composting. You could skip this expense and just start a compost pile, but using a bin will minimize smells and pests.

The large plastic container is to store compostable garbage in your kitchen until you carry it out to the compost bin.

2. Position your compost bin in a sunny spot across the yard from your home. Heat from direct sunlight will speed the compost process. Positioning the bin some distance from the home is a safeguard against odor and pest problems—though these should be minimal if composting is done properly.

3. Compost only fruit and vegetable matter, never animal products or oils. Meat, dairy, fats and oils (including discarded salad greens coated with dressing) should not be composted. They decompose slowly, smell terrible and attract pests. Don't compost pet wastes, either—these may contain animal-borne pathogens.

Egg shells and lobster shells are two animal products that do compost well—crush them into small pieces first to speed decomposition.

Large vegetable matter, such as corn cobs, should be chopped up into smaller pieces before being composted to speed decomposition. Coffee grounds and tea leaves also compost well.

4. Layer your compostable green matter with carbon-rich brown matter. Adjacent to your compost bin, keep a separate bin, garbage bag or tarp-cov-

ered pile of dry grass clippings, brown fallen leaves that have been chopped up by a mower, shredded newspaper and/or straw (not hay, which may contain weed seeds).

Each time you add nitrogen-rich vegetable matter to your compost bin,

cover it with a layer of approximately three times as much of this carbon-rich brown matter. The microorganisms that break down compost require both nitrogen and carbon.

If you find worms in your garden, you can toss them in your compost bin, too—worms help break down compost.

5. Use a rake handle or thick stick to poke a few holes into the compost every week or so. Stir the compost occasionally with a garden fork or shovel, too. This aerates the compost, getting the microorganisms that break down compost the oxygen they need. Fail to do so, and malodorous anaerobic microorganisms might thrive instead.

Helpful: If your compost bin does start to smell, aerate the compost every day or two until the smell disappears.

6. Monitor the moistness of your compost. Compost should be slightly damp. If yours seems dry, leave the compost bin's lid open on a rainy day, or run a hose through it for a few minutes. If your compost seems wet, use a shovel or garden fork to stir in additional dry brown matter—straw is ideal.

7. Remove compost from the bin when it's dark brown, moist and crumbly with an earthy smell. It could take a few months or more for your compost to be ready. Most compost bins have hatches near the bottom so the oldest compost can be easily removed. Mix it into your garden soil.

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Teri Dunn Chace, a gardener and journalist whose work has appeared in publications including *Horticulture* and *Backyard Living*. Based in Little Falls, New York, she has authored or edited more than 30 gardening books, including *The Anxious Gardener's Book of Answers* (Timber Press). <http://TeriChaceWriter.com>



>> better immediately when they consume more salt. Don't worry about getting excessive salt—the advice to follow a low-sodium diet applies only to those at risk for high blood pressure (hypertension). If your aldosterone is low, you want to raise your blood pressure, not lower it.

Recommended: Get an extra one to two grams (about one to two teaspoons) of salt a day. You might need to increase the amount slightly during the summer, when you lose more sodium in perspiration.

Drink licorice tea. Licorice (the natural root, not the candy) doesn't increase aldosterone, but it makes it more active in the body. Patients with relatively mild fatigue may notice an increase in energy when they drink a few cups of licorice tea daily.

You can make your own licorice tea by steeping about two tablespoons of fresh, peeled licorice root in a cup of simmering water for about an hour. You also can buy tea bags that contain licorice root (available at most health-food stores).

Eat grapefruit. It has the same effect as licorice. You can buy grapefruit supplements, but they're expensive. The fresh fruit works just as well—and will give you extra fiber, nutrients, etc.

Caution: Grapefruit and grapefruit juice alter the metabolism of many medications, so if you are taking other medications, talk with your doctor.

Ask about medication. Patients who have severe fatigue and/or dizziness usually need to take a synthetic form of aldosterone. Available by prescription, it's much safer than the cortisol that's used to treat full-fledged Addison's disease. Cortisol, especially if given to patients who are not cortisol-deficient, can lead to weight gain, diabetes and decreased immunity and should not be stopped abruptly.

Bonus: It's safe to stop taking synthetic aldosterone if symptoms improve and to start taking it again if you need to. Unlike cortisol, dose changes don't have to be "tapered" when stopping the medication.

I usually start patients on half a 0.1-milligram pill, taken in the morning. After a week or two, the dose can be increased to one pill. The main side

effects are headache and leg swelling, but these often decrease over time—and many patients have no side effects at all.

Also helpful: A blood pressure-raising medication, such as *midodrine* (Proamantine). Patients who combine this with *fludrocortisone* and who increase their consumption of salt often report a rapid improvement in energy and a reduction in dizziness and cognitive changes. □

Readers ask

My lawn and garden get waterlogged when it rains. What should I do?

Heavy rains can wreak havoc in your garden. To protect plants...

Improve areas that have poor drainage. Route water away by digging diversion channels that allow the water to flow into the driveway or gutter. Fill channels with gravel to prevent erosion.

If this doesn't help enough...

Keep the grass mowed short so that soil dries out quickly.

Remove grass clippings instead of leaving them on the lawn, and don't let fallen leaves collect.

Add a thin layer of topsoil to low-lying areas every few months. Then let the grass grow through it.

Plant vegetable or cut-flower gardens in raised beds.

Clear mulch away from the base of plants after a heavy rainfall. It will allow moisture to evaporate.

Choose plants that tolerate wet soil. *Examples:* Birch, flowering pear, red maple and willow trees...red-stemmed dogwood and snowball viburnum shrubs...calla lily, daylily, foxglove, hosta, iris and primrose... papyrus, rushes and other wetland grasses. Vegetables that do well in wet soil include cabbage, kale, cauliflower and broccoli.

Answer from: Kate Anchordoguy, licensed landscape contractor and president, Kate Anchordoguy Landscaping, Inc., Sebastopol, California, and author of *Dig This! Landscaping Without a Backhoe or a Big Budget* (Sasquatch).

Have a difficult question? Ask our experts...

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Want to Own a Restaurant? Pros and Cons of a Franchise

Rick Bisio

Many entrepreneurs dream of opening a restaurant, but it's a risky venture. In fact, the number of independent restaurants in the US declined by more than 7,000 in the past three years as the weak economy caused many to go belly up.

To improve the odds of success, many people choose to open a franchise—hooking up with an existing restaurant chain rather than starting from scratch. The number of chain restaurants in the US increased by more than 4,500 in the past three years, according to restaurant research firm NPD Group.

Franchises can benefit from instant recognition among potential customers. And they gain access to a wide range of experienced professionals and other resources, including experts on acquiring and negotiating for real estate, designers, marketers, inventory management software and more. If things go right, a franchise can be very lucrative.

But even with those advantages, opening a restaurant franchise is very expensive and challenging. Here's what you need to know before taking the plunge...

SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Would-be restaurateurs often enter this sector because they like to cook...they like to eat...and/or they imagine that owning a restaurant is like hosting a dinner party every night. But it's more like running a factory—one where perishable raw materials must be converted into appealing finished products very quickly for fickle customers in an extremely competitive industry.

Key skills include the ability to recruit, manage and motivate a workforce

despite low wages and rapid turnover... to understand and control inventory and labor costs...to pay close attention to details...and to be comfortable dealing with customers. Being a talented cook is not important—the owner's role is to run the business, not the stove.

Smart: If you have not worked in restaurants, take a job in one before you open a franchise to make sure that you enjoy this lifestyle. Expect to work long hours, including weekends and evenings.

Exception: A restaurant in a business district might be open only on weekdays and only for breakfast and lunch.

Opening a franchise requires considerable cash. The franchise fee—the amount the franchisor charges for the right to open a restaurant in the system—is only a small part of startup costs. It doesn't include major expenses such as the lease, dining room decor, kitchen equipment and supplies.

Example: The Subway chain has a franchise fee of just \$25,000 but requires a total all-in investment of \$200,000 to \$225,000—and it's among the least expensive restaurant franchises.

Snack and dessert franchises such as Doc Popcorn tend to be the least expensive in the restaurant category, >>

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Rick Bisio, a franchise consultant based in Bradenton Beach, Florida. He previously was director of international business for AFC Enterprises, the company behind Popeye's Chicken and Biscuits, Church's Chicken, Cinnabon and Seattle's Best Coffee. Bisio is author of *The Educated Franchisee: The How-To Book for Choosing a Winning Franchise, Second Edition* (Bascom Hill). www.EducatedFranchisee.com

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