

Adrenal Insufficiency

Notes:

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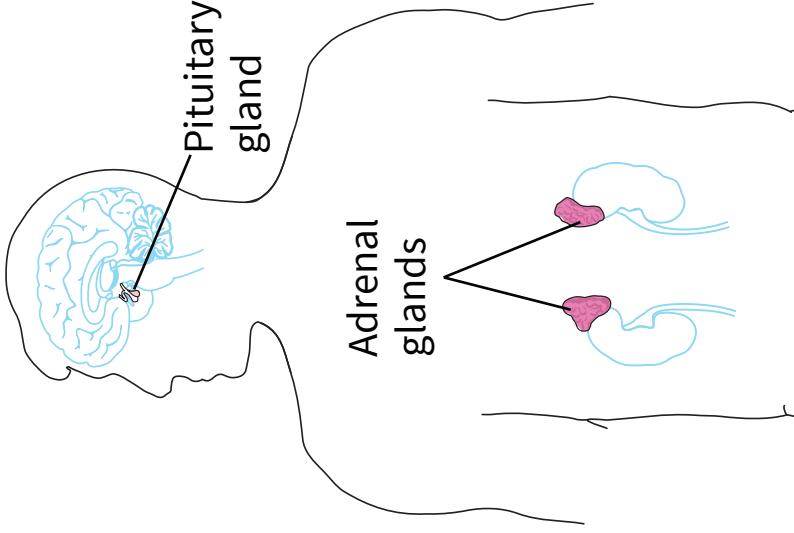
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Adrenal Insufficiency

What are adrenal glands?

- Your body has 2 adrenal glands, 1 on top of each kidney.
- The adrenal glands make steroid hormones called **cortisol** and **aldosterone**. Steroid hormones are needed for your body to work well.



- **Cortisol** helps your body use sugar and protein for energy, and helps you respond to stress and infections.
 - › The pituitary gland makes a hormone called ACTH (adrenocorticotropic hormone). It uses ACTH to control the release of cortisol.
- **Aldosterone** helps your body regulate blood pressure by keeping the right amounts of salt, potassium, and water.

What if I am not able to take my medication?

- If you are too sick to take your medication, or if you keep vomiting, you must inject cortisol (Solu-Cortef®) using a needle.
 - › You and someone you live with should learn how to give this injection.
- You will not cause any harm by giving an injection of Solu-Cortef® that you later find out you did not need.

- Missing a dose of your usual steroid hormone replacements can be life-threatening.
- It is important that you take the missed dose as soon as you remember.
- Then go to the nearest Emergency Department or call your primary health care provider right away.
- You will always need a high dose in any stressful situation (like having surgery or being in a serious accident).

MedicAlert™

You must wear a MedicAlert™ bracelet or tag at all times so that Emergency Department staff will know you have adrenal insufficiency.



Stressful times are when you have:

- › A fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- › Vomiting
- › Diarrhea
- › The flu
- › A severe (very bad) cold
- › Any illness that stops you from doing your usual activities
- › An infection
- › Surgery

Remember: During these stressful times, you need to take 2 times the amount of cortisol medication you usually take for at least 3 days. Once you are feeling better, go back to your usual dose.

There may be times when you do not feel well because you are physically tired or emotionally stressed.

- › **Usually, you do not need to take more than your regular dose at these times, but it is important to remember to take your regular dose.**
- › If you are not sure, it is better to take 2 times your usual dose. **Taking too much for a short time will not harm you.**

What is adrenal insufficiency?

- Insufficiency means not enough. Adrenal insufficiency happens when your adrenal glands do not make enough hormones.
- Adrenal insufficiency may be permanent or temporary.

If it is permanent, you must take medication every day for the rest of your life.

Permanent adrenal insufficiency can be caused by:

- › Addison's disease (your adrenal glands do not make enough hormones)
- › Removal of your adrenal glands
- › Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) (a group of inherited [passed from parents to their children] disorders of the adrenal glands)
- › Pituitary tumours
- › Removal of your pituitary gland

Temporary adrenal insufficiency can be caused by:

- › Using a steroid medication
- › Medications that lower your cortisol levels (like ketoconazole)
- › Pituitary gland surgery
- › Adrenal gland surgery

What are the symptoms of adrenal insufficiency?

If your body does not make enough adrenal hormones, you may not feel well. Symptoms may include:

- › Unusual tiredness and weakness
- › Vomiting (throwing up)
- › Dizziness when you stand up
- › Diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
- › Nausea (upset stomach)
- › Not feeling hungry
- › Stomachache

Each person's symptoms may be different.

Over time, you may have:

- › Weight loss
- › Cravings for salt
- › Darkening of your skin

How is adrenal insufficiency treated?

- **You must take medication every day** to keep your adrenal insufficiency under control.
- Your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) will prescribe a **replacement dose** (amount). This is the amount your adrenal glands would normally make in a **situation that is not stressful**.

- **You must take this medication in the amount and at the times prescribed by your primary health care provider.** This dose will not harm you. It is not the same as larger doses of steroids given for treatment of other medical conditions.
- **If you have problems with cortisol**, you can take:
 - › Hydrocortisone
 - › Cortef®
 - › Prednisone
 - › Solu-Cortef®
 - › Cortisone acetate
- **If you have problems with aldosterone (Aldactone®)**, you can take:
 - › Florinef®

When should I take more than my regular dose?

- Adrenal glands that are working properly make more cortisol when the body is under some types of stress.
- **During stressful times, you will need to take 2 times the amount of your prescribed cortisol dose.**
- Talk to your primary health care provider about this.