

ADRENAL INSUFFICIENCY PATIENT RESOURCE

ADRENAL HORMONES

Adrenal hormones are produced by the 2 adrenal glands that sit on top of each kidney. Adrenal Insufficiency (AI) is a condition where the body cannot produce enough adrenal hormones which are essential to life.

Adrenal hormones are called “stress hormones” because they allow the body to respond to stress.

-  **Cortisol (a glucocorticoid hormone)**
Regulates blood pressure, wound healing, and blood sugar
-  **Aldosterone (a mineralocorticoid hormone)**
Regulates blood pressure, water, and salt balance

Primary Adrenal Insufficiency happens when the adrenal glands are directly affected (eg. from autoimmune disease, infection, or surgery), resulting in a lack of both cortisol and aldosterone.

Secondary Adrenal Insufficiency happens when the brain signals to the adrenal glands are affected (eg. from too much glucocorticoid for other conditions, opioid medications, or damage to the pituitary gland), resulting in a deficiency of only cortisol.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Fatigue/ exhaustion
- Fainting or dizziness on standing
- Low blood pressure
- Severe nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea
- Weight loss
- Back or abdomen pain
- Darkening of skin or gums (In primary AI only)
- Salt craving (In primary AI only)

WE RECOMMEND



Wear a medical alert bracelet or necklace with the term “ADRENAL INSUFFICIENT- STEROID DEPENDENT”.



Keep a wallet card, and/or a have letter from your doctor outlining the need for emergency medications and dosing recommendations

HOW AI IS TREATED?

Cortisol Replacement



hydrocortisone (Cortef™), cortisone acetate, dexamethasone, OR prednisone.

Aldosterone Replacement



(For primary AI only)

fludrocortisone (Florinef™)

TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF...



Dizzy when getting out of bed or changing position



Worsening energy



Unwanted weight loss or weight gain



Blood sugars too high or too low



Blood pressure too high (> 140/90 mmHg) or too low (< 90/60 mmHg)



Worsening salt craving



Mood changes (e.g. depression, anxiety, irritability)



Undergoing procedure or pregnancy

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

During illness, surgery, physical injury, or emotional stress, your body requires additional cortisol doses and in some circumstances this can be life threatening if not treated (Adrenal Crisis).

See your personal treatment plan regarding stress dosing and adrenal crisis management.



Ask your doctor about the need for an emergency glucocorticoid injection kit at home, which may be recommended in cases of significant illness or travel. Keep in mind, you still need to go to the hospital if you have adrenal crisis symptoms.



Ensure that friends/family can recognize the signs and symptoms of adrenal crisis and when to get help.



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RESOURCES

- Hormone Health Network: <http://www.hormone.org/diseases-and-conditions/adrenal-insufficiency>
- Patient.info: <https://patient.info/signs-symptoms/tiredness-fatigue/addisons-disease>
- National Adrenal Disease Foundation: <https://www.nadf.us/adrenal-diseases/addisons-disease/>
- AHS Health Link (available 24/7): Call 811 or visit <https://myhealth.alberta.ca>
- MyHealth Alberta: <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/>
- Injection kit video demos: <https://www.addisonsdisease.org.uk/the-emergency-injection-for-the-treatment-of-adrenal-crisis>

NOTES



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