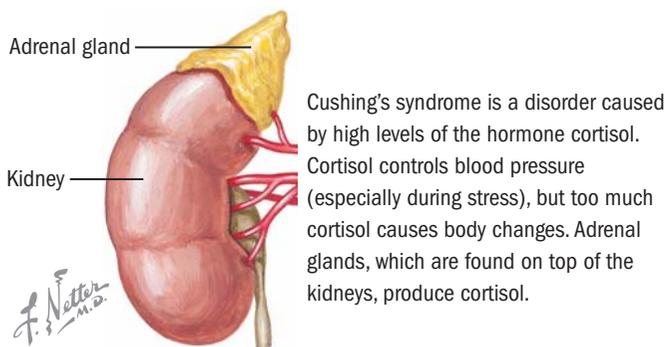
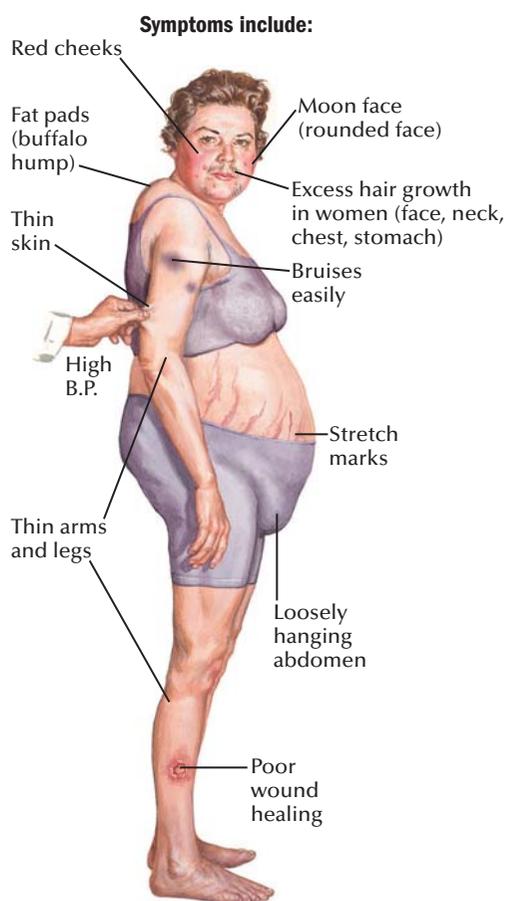


MANAGING YOUR CUSHING'S SYNDROME



Cushing's syndrome is a disorder caused by high levels of the hormone cortisol. Cortisol controls blood pressure (especially during stress), but too much cortisol causes body changes. Adrenal glands, which are found on top of the kidneys, produce cortisol.



Symptoms include:

What Is Cushing's Syndrome?

Cushing's syndrome is a rare endocrine illness caused by exposure of body tissues to too much cortisol in the bloodstream. Produced by the adrenal glands, cortisol is a substance (hormone) that helps the body control blood pressure and respond to stress. Extra cortisol, however, produces abnormal body changes.

Cushing's syndrome affects both men and women of any age but occurs most often in women 25 to 45 years old. It may increase the risk of getting diabetes, hypertension, osteoporosis, and obesity.

What Causes Cushing's Syndrome?

Extra cortisol may come from medicines prescribed by doctors for other conditions (e.g., asthma, bronchitis, arthritis). Certain tumors may produce excess cortisol. These tumors may be in the pituitary gland, adrenal gland, or other places.

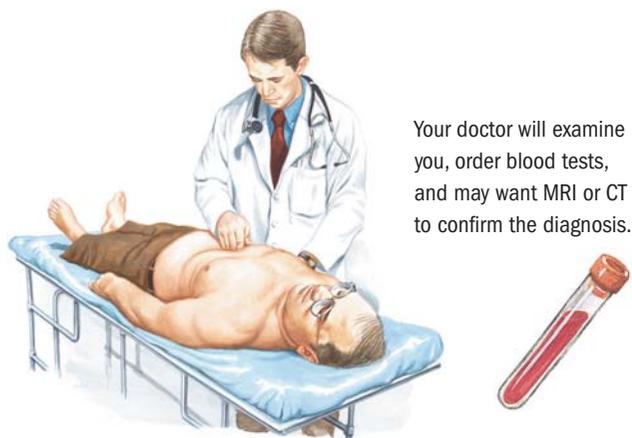
What Are the Symptoms of Cushing's Syndrome?

Symptoms are weight gain, rounded face, fat around the neck, and thin arms and legs. Children are obese and grow slowly. The stomach, legs, arms, and breasts may show purplish-pink stretch marks. Thin, delicate skin bruises easily and heals poorly. Bones are weak and brittle and may break. Hormonal changes in women mean that they usually have too much hair growth on the face, neck, chest, stomach, and thighs. Periods may be irregular or stop. Men may be impotent. Other symptoms are urinating often, severe tiredness, weak muscles, high blood pressure, personality changes, and feeling irritable, anxious, and depressed.

How Is Cushing's Syndrome Diagnosed?

The doctor will make a diagnosis by doing a physical examination and testing blood and urine.

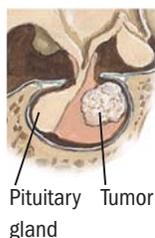
If cortisol levels are high, another doctor (an endocrinologist, a specialist who treats diseases of glands and hormones) will order other tests. These tests usually involve taking medicine and providing blood and urine samples. Computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the belly (abdomen) to look for tumors of adrenal glands (located above the kidneys) or of the brain to look for pituitary gland tumors may be done.





Your doctor will develop a treatment plan based on possible causes of Cushing's and your cortisol levels. Get regular checkups to control symptoms. Heavy drinking and a history of depression can cause false-positive results on tests, so truthful answers to questions about drinking and depression will help diagnosis and treatment.

Certain medicines can increase cortisol levels, so your doctor may change your current drugs. Your doctor may also prescribe new medicine to block effects of cortisol on your body.



An abnormal growth, such as a pituitary tumor, may cause the increased cortisol level. In these cases, treatment of the growth may involve surgery, radiation, and drugs (chemotherapy).

Don't become discouraged. You may become frustrated during the recovery period. Look for a support group in your community for people with Cushing's syndrome. If you can't find a group, try starting one.



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NOTES

How Is Cushing's Syndrome Treated?

If medicine is the cause, the doctor can change the dose to lower the cortisol levels or give medicine that blocks effects of cortisol on the body.

For an abnormal growth (tumor), treatment may include surgery to remove the growth, radiation, and drugs (chemotherapy).

If no cause is found, rarely adrenal glands are removed to prevent extra cortisol from being made. Medicine to replace missing cortisol is then needed.

Recovery time depends on duration of the illness, cortisol levels, and basic health.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Cushing's Syndrome:

- ✓ **DO** minimize using corticosteroid hormones.
- ✓ **DO** see your doctor regularly. Have regular checkups for blood sugar level, blood pressure, and bone density.
- ✓ **DO** look for a nearby support group.
- ✓ **DO** tell your doctor if you have had depression or drink alcohol daily.
- ✓ **DO** find an experienced surgeon if you need surgery.
- ✓ **DO** eat less fat and calories.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have a fever, infection, or increased bruising or you gain too much weight.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor for weakness or dizziness after surgery.
- ⊗ **DON'T** become discouraged.
- ⊗ **DON'T** begin exercise until your doctor checks blood pressure, blood sugar, and bones.
- ⊗ **DON'T** overeat.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists
Tel: (904) 353-7878
Website: <http://www.aace.com>
- Cushing's Support and Research Foundation
Tel: (617) 723-3824
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
Tel: (301) 496-3583
Website: <http://www.endocrine.niddk.nih.gov/pubs/cushings/cushings.htm>