



# ADDISON'S DISEASE



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A rare disease that involves failure of the adrenal glands. The adrenal glands produce hormones (cortisol and aldosterone) that affect almost every body organ and tissue. These hormones help the body respond to stress, maintain blood pressure, help heart and blood vessel function, and are involved in metabolism. Addison's disease can occur in all age groups. It affects men and women equally.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms may develop slowly over months or years. Symptoms are caused by low levels of hormones produced by the adrenal glands.
- Weakness and fatigue.
- Nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, diarrhea, and appetite and weight loss.
- Low blood pressure, causing faintness and dizziness.
- Brownish skin (looks suntanned) with white patches.
- Darkening of freckles, scars, and nipples.
- Hair loss.
- Feeling cold all the time.
- Behavior or mood changes, including aggression or depression.

### CAUSES

- The cause is usually unknown, but is believed to be an autoimmune disorder.
- It also may be a result of tuberculosis, cancer, pituitary disease, or AIDS.
- Use of oral cortisone drugs for other conditions. When cortisone is stopped, normal adrenal function sometimes does not return.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Other autoimmune diseases.
- Disorders mentioned in causes.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No specific preventive measures.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The disease can be controlled with hormone replacement. A normal lifestyle can be expected.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Adrenal crisis caused by injury or illness. Symptoms may include pain, weakness, low blood pressure, high or low temperature, or fainting.
- Increased risk of infections.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms. Medical tests may include blood and urine studies, tests to measure adrenal function, and CT or MRI.
- Treatment involves replacing the hormones the adrenal glands are not making.
- This is a lifelong condition. Learn how to care for yourself. Strict attention to drug schedules is vital.
- Learn about adrenal crisis and its relationship to body stress (infection, surgery, or injury).
- Advise any doctor or dentist who treats you that you have Addison's disease.
- If you live or travel where medical care is not readily available, you may be given instructions on giving yourself cortisone injections in case of emergency.
- Wear a medical alert-type bracelet or tag to indicate you have Addison's disease and the name of the drug and dosage that you take.
- Stay up-to-date on vaccines, such as those for influenza and pneumonia.
- Hospital care may be needed for an adrenal crisis.
- To learn more: National Adrenal Diseases Foundation, 505 Northern Blvd, Great Neck, NY 11021, (516) 487-4992 (not toll-free); website: [www.medhelp.org/nadf](http://www.medhelp.org/nadf).

### MEDICATIONS

Drugs to replace the hormones cortisol and aldosterone will be prescribed as needed. Never change or stop taking your drugs without medical advice.

### ACTIVITY

No limits.

### DIET

Special diet may be prescribed (e.g., one to maintain proper balance of sodium and potassium).



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of Addison's disease.
- After diagnosis, infection, injury, or dehydration develops. Drugs may need a dosage change.
- Swollen ankles, weight gain, or new symptoms occur.

