

Understanding Cushing syndrome (hypercortisolism)

Cushing syndrome may occur if the body has too much cortisol. But what is cortisol? How does it affect the body? Why is too much cortisol harmful? Use this resource to help answer some common questions and make sense of how Cushing syndrome affects the body.

What is cortisol?

Cortisol is a hormone that the body naturally makes. Because this hormone affects many parts of the body, having too much of it may cause serious problems. [Click here for a list of signs and symptoms.](#)

Cortisol helps control many body functions, such as:



Blood sugar levels



Metabolism



Blood pressure



Salt & water balance



Mood & memory



Immune system



Bone health

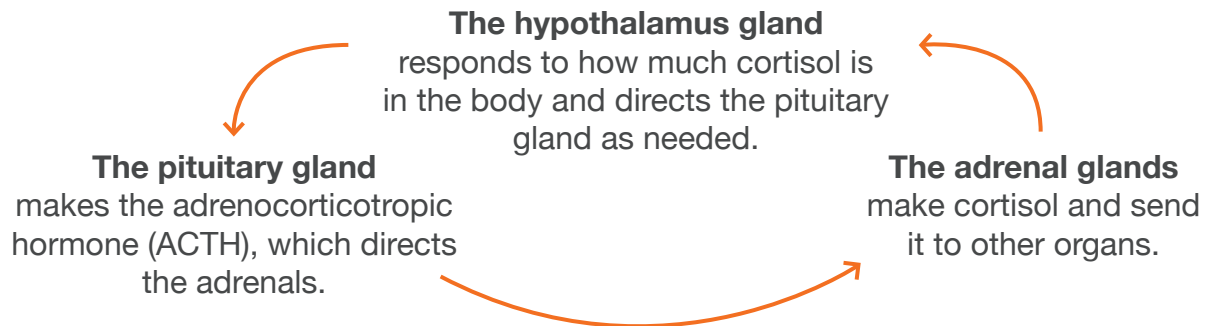
Visit CortisolMatters.com/Patient to learn more about cortisol.

How is cortisol made?

Cortisol is made in the **endocrine system**, which is a series of glands that create different types of hormones.

Typically, the body makes more cortisol in the morning and less at night. This is called diurnal rhythm, and it impacts several body functions. If there is too much cortisol in the body, this rhythm may become disrupted. Some people may experience signs and symptoms such as insomnia, severe fatigue, and skin changes. [Click here to learn about other potential signs and symptoms.](#)

How cortisol is made in the endocrine system:



These 3 glands (often called the HPA-axis) work together in a feedback loop. This is an ongoing cycle to maintain proper cortisol levels.

How does cortisol work, step by step?

1. Cortisol is released into the bloodstream and delivered throughout the body
2. Cortisol attaches to a glucocorticoid receptor, or GR
3. The GR helps cortisol deliver its message to the cell, changing how the cell behaves

Visit CortisolMatters.com/Patient to learn more.

If cortisol activity in the body does not go back to normal, this may lead to a number of serious health issues over time.

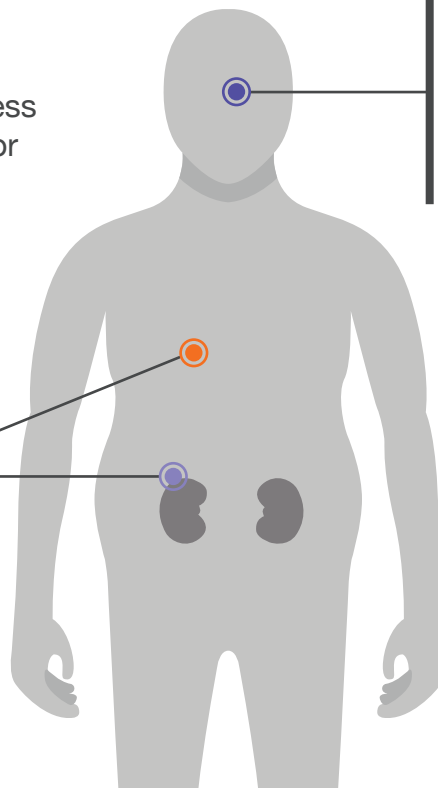
What causes Cushing syndrome (hypercortisolism)?

There are different types of Cushing syndrome that may occur when the body has too much cortisol over a long period of time. Excess cortisol could be caused by:

- Something **inside** the body, like a growth (**endogenous** Cushing syndrome)
- Something **outside** the body, like steroids (**exogenous** Cushing syndrome)

Cushing syndrome may occur if the body has too much cortisol—regardless of if it's caused by something inside or outside the body.

If the source of Cushing syndrome is internal (endogenous), it could be a growth on the pituitary gland, **adrenal glands**, or somewhere else in the body. If the growth is somewhere else in the body, it is called an **ectopic** source.



Cushing disease is a form of Cushing syndrome that can occur when someone has a growth on the **pituitary gland**.

Cushing syndrome can be difficult to diagnose. That's why the Endocrine Society recommends being seen by a doctor who specializes in conditions like Cushing syndrome, such as an endocrinologist.

Ask your primary care doctor if seeing an endocrinologist is right for you.

Visit [CortisolMatters.com/Patient](https://www.cortisolmatters.com/patient) to find specialists in your area who have experience diagnosing and treating Cushing syndrome.

What are the signs and symptoms of Cushing syndrome (hypercortisolism)?

Because cortisol affects so many parts of the body, there are many potential health issues associated with Cushing syndrome.

Below is a list of signs and symptoms people with Cushing syndrome may experience. Cushing syndrome is different for everybody, so you may not experience everything in the list below.

General Health

- Difficult to control or uncontrolled blood sugar (diabetes)*
- Difficult to control or uncontrolled blood pressure
- Irregular periods and menstrual cycles
- Blood clots or a history of blood clots
- Weak bones and bone fractures
- Kidney stones
- Trouble healing from wounds

Appearance

- Unwanted hair growth or hair loss
- Fatty hump between the shoulders (buffalo hump)
- Easy bruising, fragile skin, rashes
- Round face (moon face) and/or reddened face
- Purple stretch marks (striae)
- Weight gain around the center of your body
- Thin arms and legs

Mood

- Trouble remembering things, difficulty concentrating, brain fog, forgetfulness
- Extreme mood swings
- Depression, feeling hopeless
- Irritability, anger, feeling short-fused
- Anxiety

Energy

- Muscle weakness
- Extreme fatigue, easily fatigued
- Insomnia
- Sexual dysfunction

***Type 2 diabetes (high blood sugar) is a common underlying sign of hypercortisolism.**

To learn more about these signs and symptoms, visit CortisolMatters.com/Patient.