

KidsHealth Parents Adrenal Insufficiency

Adrenal Insufficiency

en español: [Insuficiencia suprarrenal](#)

Medically reviewed by: [Evan G. Graber, DO](#)

[Learn About Endocrinology \(Hormones & Growth\) at Nemours Children's Health](#)



Listen

Print

MORE ON THIS TOPIC FOR:

What Is Adrenal Insufficiency?

Adrenal insufficiency happens when the adrenal **glands** make fewer hormones than they should.

This can cause:

- weakness
- tiredness
- belly pain
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- dehydration
- skin changes

Parents

[Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia](#)

[Endocrine System](#)

[Dehydroepiandrosterone-Sulfate \(DHEA-S\) Blood Test](#)

[Estradiol Blood Test](#)

Some people with adrenal insufficiency have no symptoms unless they're exposed to stress.

What Are the Adrenal Glands?

There are two adrenal (eh-DREE-nul) glands, which sit above the kidneys. They make important

Doctors diagnose adrenal insufficiency with blood tests to check hormone levels. They also might order:

- an ACTH stimulation test to see how the body responds to an injection of adrenocorticotrophic hormone
- magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to check the size and shape of the pituitary gland

How Is Adrenal Insufficiency Treated?

Doctors treat adrenal insufficiency by giving replacement hormones. They might prescribe:

- a corticosteroid taken by mouth several times a day to replace cortisol
- a medicine called fludrocortisone taken by mouth to replace aldosterone and balance the body's levels of salt and fluids

Corticosteroid doses often need to increase during times of illness or stress.

What Is an Adrenal Crisis?

Sometimes, symptoms can suddenly become much worse, usually when someone is stressed by illness or injury. This is called an **adrenal crisis**. It needs medical treatment right away. Someone having an adrenal crisis needs to go to the hospital for IV (given into a vein) fluids and further doses of corticosteroids.

Signs of an adrenal crisis can include:

- vomiting
- belly pain
- severe weakness
- sweating a lot
- confusion

[Permissions/Credit](#)[For Teens](#)[Media Requests](#)[Contact Us](#)[WELLNESS CENTERS](#)[For Parents](#)[For Kids](#)[For Teens](#)

Note: All information on Nemours® KidsHealth® is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor. © 1995-2025. The Nemours Foundation. Nemours Children's Health®, KidsHealth®, and Well Beyond Medicine® are registered trademarks of The Nemours Foundation. All rights reserved. Images sourced by The Nemours Foundation and Getty Images.

