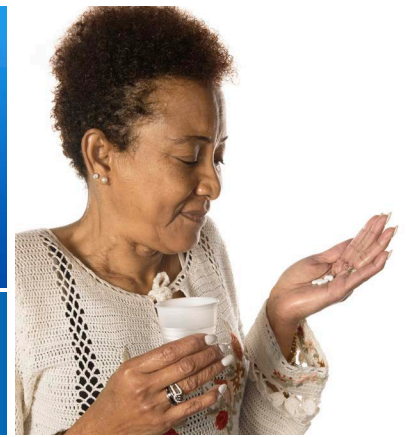


Hydrocortisone (cortisol) in tablet form



Your doctor has prescribed hydrocortisone (cortisol) because you're not producing enough of it. This health sheet explains how this medication works and what precautions are necessary when taking it.

Why do I need to take this medication?

Normally, the body produces a hormone called cortisol. You have a disease that reduces the amount of this hormone. Hydrocortisone helps to replace the cortisol you're missing and to have a normal amount in your body.

What is cortisol?

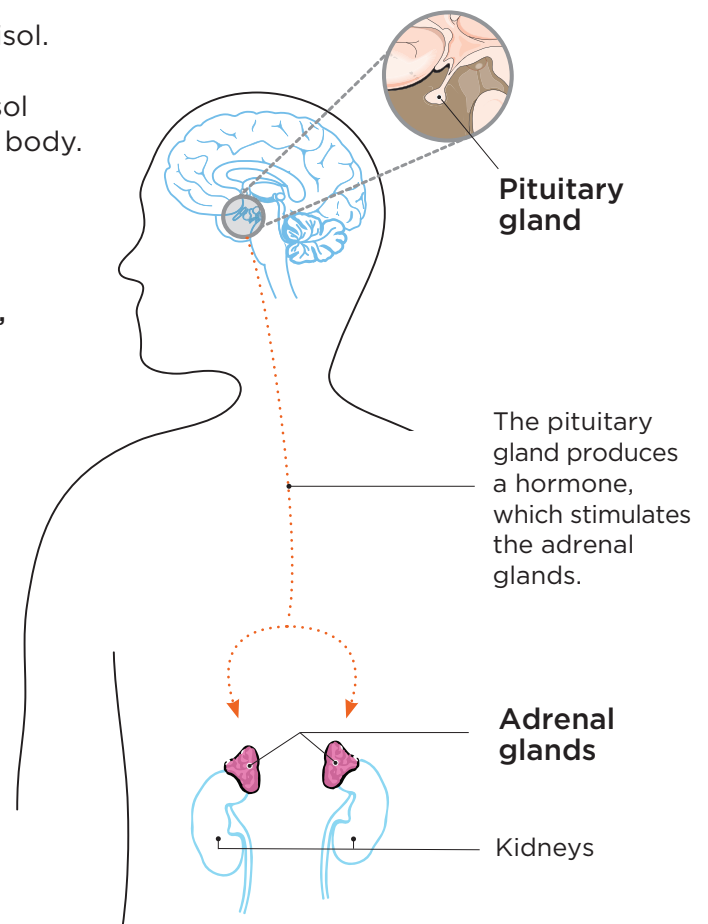
Cortisol is produced by the **adrenal glands**, which are above the kidneys. Another gland, the **pituitary gland**, located in the brain, controls this production.

Cortisol is the stress hormone. It plays the following important roles:

- Maintaining healthy blood pressure.
- Providing you with the energy you need to get through a normal day of activities.
- Activating your reserves to combat physical or emotional stress.
- Helping to control or heal inflammation.

If a disease affects the glands that produce cortisol, its level may drop. The symptoms of cortisol deficiency are:

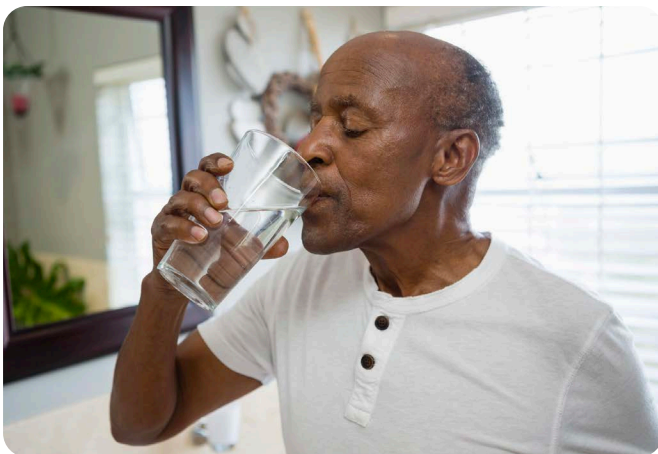
- fatigue
- dizziness
- loss of consciousness
- joint pain
- nausea
- vomiting



How should I take the medication?

It's taken in tablet form. Follow your doctor's instructions. The dose will be related to how much cortisol your body is missing.

Usually, the medication is taken 2 to 3 times a day. Take the first dose in the morning when you get up. This will give you energy to start the day. The last dose should be taken between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.



CAUTION !

Never stop this medication without talking to your doctor. Stopping it abruptly could cause serious problems.

You need to wear a **medical bracelet** at all times (such as MedicAlert).

You should also carry a medical card that indicates that you take hydrocortisone every day. This bracelet and card explain what to do in the case of an accident, if you lose consciousness, or if you need urgent surgery. That way, people will know you need a cortisone injection.



You can get information about the bracelet and card from your pharmacist or online.



Always carry an **emergency kit** with you. It could be useful while waiting for help. The kit should contain:

- a vial of injectable hydrocortisone (Solu-Cortef)
- instructions for preparing and injecting the drug (you'll be shown how to do it)
- a syringe
- a needle
- disinfectant pads

How long will the treatment continue?

You may need to take this medication for the rest of your life. If so, you'll see your doctor regularly.



What are the side effects?

There should be no side effects from taking this medication. If you feel something isn't normal, talk to your pharmacist or care team.

Can I drink alcohol during this treatment?

It's possible, but drinking so much that you end up vomiting can cause a serious problem in the adrenal glands, called an adrenal crisis. If this happens, your body may run out of cortisol to the point where your life is at risk.

If you drink alcohol in moderation, it won't interact with the medication.

What should I do if I'm taking other medications or natural health products?

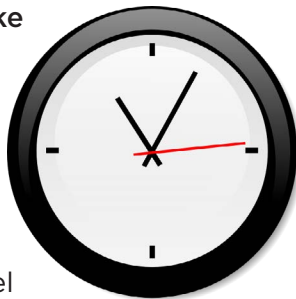
When taken with other products, this medication can cause side effects that are sometimes serious. Talk to your pharmacist to see what else you can take while you're on this medication.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

It's important to always take your medication. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you realize you've missed it.

If more than 12 hours have gone by since the scheduled time and you feel well, don't take the medication; just wait for the next dose. **Don't double the dose.**

However, if you have symptoms (such as fatigue or dizziness), take your missed dose as soon as possible.



CAUTION !

Never stop taking this medication without talking to your doctor.

What other precautions should I take?

Your medication dose will need to be adjusted in some cases:

Illness (fever, flu, cold, gastroenteritis, or other illnesses)

Severe emotional stress (such as a bereavement)

In these cases:

- **If your health condition requires you to go to the hospital or emergency clinic.**

Tell the healthcare staff that you're taking hydrocortisone. If you have severe symptoms (see the question on serious symptoms, page 4), give yourself an injection of Solu-Cortef before leaving for the hospital. The healthcare professionals will also increase the dose as needed.



- **If you don't need to go to the doctor** (e.g., if you have a cold, diarrhea, or severe temporary stress).

Double your dose for the duration of the illness or stress. If you have any doubts or worries, double the dose for 2 to 3 days and talk to your pharmacist.



CAUTION !

If you need surgery, tell the healthcare team that you're taking this medication. They'll give you higher doses.

What serious symptoms should I watch out for?

- You can no longer take your medication by mouth because you vomit.
- You feel very weak, dizzy, or you feel like vomiting.
- You have a very bad stomach ache.
- You have severe diarrhea.
- You have lost consciousness.
- You have a significant drop in blood pressure.



If you have any of these symptoms, inject yourself with 100 mg of Solu-Cortef and go to the emergency room right away.

What's the right place to store my medication?

Store it in a safe place, out of the reach of children. It's sensitive to heat and humidity. Don't store it in the kitchen or bathroom. Keep it at room temperature.

Who can I contact for help or to ask question?

Talk to your pharmacist or your nurse. You can also discuss your questions with your doctor at your next appointment.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Support associations for people with adrenal gland disorders

Association Surrénales (French only)
surrenales.com

The Canadian Addison Society

Here you'll find, among other things, the steps to follow when injecting yourself with hydrocortisone in an emergency.

addisonsociety.ca

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you.



You can also read them online
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca