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# When You Have Addison Disease

You have been diagnosed with Addison disease. Your adrenal glands don't make enough of the hormone cortisol. In some cases, the adrenal glands also don't make enough of the hormones aldosterone and dehydroepiandrosterone. This disease is also called adrenal insufficiency or hypocortisolism. A flare-up is called an Addisonian crisis or an adrenal crisis. Here's what you can do to care for yourself.

## Medicine instructions

- Take all medicines for this disease exactly as directed. You will need to take replacement hormones for the rest of your life. Your medicine dose may need to be doubled or tripled if you are injured or become seriously ill. Ask your healthcare provider to explain when and why you might need to increase your steroid dose.
- You may need an emergency shot if you are in an accident or if you can't keep your oral hormone pill down because of vomiting. Carry a steroid injection kit for emergencies as directed by your healthcare provider.
- Before you have any type of surgery, tell your healthcare provider or surgeon that you have Addison disease. Your steroid dose may need to be increased.
- Get a medical ID bracelet that says, "Addison disease: needs steroid medicine daily." Wear it at all times, in case of emergency. Always carry a list of your medicines and dosages along with the name and telephone number of the provider who treats your Addison disease.

## Preventing dehydration

It's very important to not get dehydrated. To do this:

- Increase your salt intake if your healthcare provider advises you to. Examples of salty foods are canned soups and potato chips. Use table salt where needed. If you are taking a mineralocorticoid pill, your provider may need to increase your dose during warmer months of the year if you are sweating more.
- Treat minor flare-ups by drinking more fluids and eating more salty foods.

## Preventing Addisonian crisis

Addisonian crisis can occur if don't have enough steroid hormone during stress or you are dehydrated. To prevent an Addisonian crisis:

- Take your medicine regularly. You may need to increase your hormone medicine at times. Your healthcare provider should explain when you will need to do this.
- Don't get dehydrated. Drink plenty of fluids.
- Stay healthy. Stay away from crowds during cold and flu season.
- Practice good hygiene. Wash your hands often.

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- Ask your healthcare provider about vaccines to help keep you healthy. Always get the yearly flu vaccine, unless you are allergic to it.
  - If you are ill, take extra medicine doses as directed by your healthcare team.
  - If you can't keep the medicine down because of vomiting, take the medicine by injection, as directed by your healthcare team.
  - Make certain a close family member or friend is educated about your Addison disease. This person should know how you treat it and where you keep your medicines. They should understand the danger signs that mean you need medical care right away.

## **Alerting your healthcare providers**

Tell all of your healthcare providers that you have Addison disease. This includes your dentists, surgeons, and any specialists.

## **Follow-up care**

Make a follow-up appointment as directed by your healthcare provider. Keep your regular follow-up appointments with your provider. Always contact your provider if you have questions about managing your disease.

## **When to call your healthcare provider**

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Tiredness or weakness
- Loss of appetite or weight loss
- Dizziness when you stand up
- Muscle aches
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Sharp pain in your lower back, belly (abdomen), or legs
- Infection of any kind
- Depression
- Confusion
- Severe emotional stress
- Serious injury
- A fever of 100.4°F ( 38°C) or higher, or as advised by your provider
- Darkening of your skin