

Adrenal insufficiency

Adrenal insufficiency is a condition in which the adrenal glands do not produce adequate amounts of [steroid hormones](#), primarily cortisol; but may also include impaired production of aldosterone (a mineralocorticoid), which regulates sodium conservation, potassium secretion, and water retention. Craving for salt or salty foods due to the urinary losses of sodium is common.

Clinical

- fatigue
- weakness
- arthralgia
- anorexia
- nausea
- hypotension
- [orthostatic dizziness](#)
- hypoglycemia
- dyspnea
- Addisonian crisis (if severe; with risk of death)

[Addison's disease](#) and congenital adrenal hyperplasia can manifest as adrenal insufficiency. If not treated, adrenal insufficiency may result in severe abdominal pains, vomiting, profound muscle weakness and fatigue, depression, extremely low blood pressure (hypotension), weight loss, kidney failure, changes in mood and personality, and shock (adrenal crisis).

An adrenal crisis often occurs if the body is subjected to stress, such as an accident, injury, surgery, or severe infection; death may quickly follow.

Adrenal insufficiency can also occur when the hypothalamus or the pituitary gland does not make adequate amounts of the hormones that assist in regulating adrenal function.

This is called [secondary adrenal insufficiency](#) or tertiary adrenal insufficiency and is caused by lack of production of ACTH in the pituitary or lack of CRH in the hypothalamus, respectively.

Duration of [dexamethasone](#) use and total exposure predict for adrenal insufficiency in patients with brain and skull base tumours. Values derived from a study may be useful to identify patients at higher

risk of adrenal suppression who require empirical [hydrocortisone](#) pending formal testing of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis ¹⁾.

Diagnosis

see [ACTH test](#).

¹⁾

Benghiat H, Sanghera P, Stange D, Nightingale P, Hartley A, O'Reilly MW, Nundall N, Currie H, Ali M, Cruickshank G, Spooner D, Toogood A. Dexamethasone-related adrenal insufficiency in patients with brain and skull base tumours. Support Care Cancer. 2018 Jun 1. doi: 10.1007/s00520-018-4264-4. [Epub ahead of print] PubMed PMID: 29858690.

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