

Do you want to know?

Cushing's Syndrome

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What is it?

Cushing's syndrome is a hormonal disorder caused by high levels of the hormone cortisol.

The causes of high cortisol levels can be several:

- a benign tumor in the pituitary gland (an endocrine gland that sits at the base of the brain and secretes hormones to regulate the body's equilibrium)
- a benign tumor in the adrenal gland (gland located above the kidney that helps the body deal with stress.)
- intake of medicines that contain cortisol or cortisol-like hormones
- other very rare tumors

What do you need to know?

Population at risk

Cushing's syndrome in general is rare. It can occur in both men and women.

A much more common cause of Cushing's syndrome is the excessive intake of steroid hormone.

Symptoms

- The disease is characterized by upper body obesity, thinning of the arms and legs, thin skin, poor purplish healing, stretch marks on the abdomen, thighs, buttocks, arms and breasts, weak bones and muscles, backaches, fatigue, high blood pressure and blood sugar, irritability, anxiety and depression.
- In women, symptoms also include excess hair growth on face, neck, chest, abdomen and thighs with irregular menstrual periods.

Treatment options

The treatment depends on the cause.

Surgery

The main form of therapy is surgery of either the adrenal or the pituitary gland. If surgery is not an option, drugs can be considered.

Medication



In addition, there are certain medications which can help decrease cortisol production

Radiation

In case of a pituitary tumor, and if removal was not complete, radiation can be added to therapy.

Drugs

Use medications (adrenal enzyme inhibitors) as prescribed by your physician.

Diet



Follow a high protein, low salt, and low carbohydrate diet as per dietitian's instructions in order to prevent weight gain and water retention.

Activity for bed-bound patients



- Change position frequently to prevent skin breakdown.
- Encourage moderate activity to prevent complications of immobility.

Considerations



- Oral Hygiene is important because you may be at risk to get oral thrush.
- Avoid trauma to skin because the skin becomes fragile and will break easily.
- Inspect pressure areas daily for signs of skin breakdown.

The content of this educational leaflet is of general information. Ask your physician or health care provider if this content applies to you.

Prepared by the Nursing Services in coordination with other health care disciplines.

