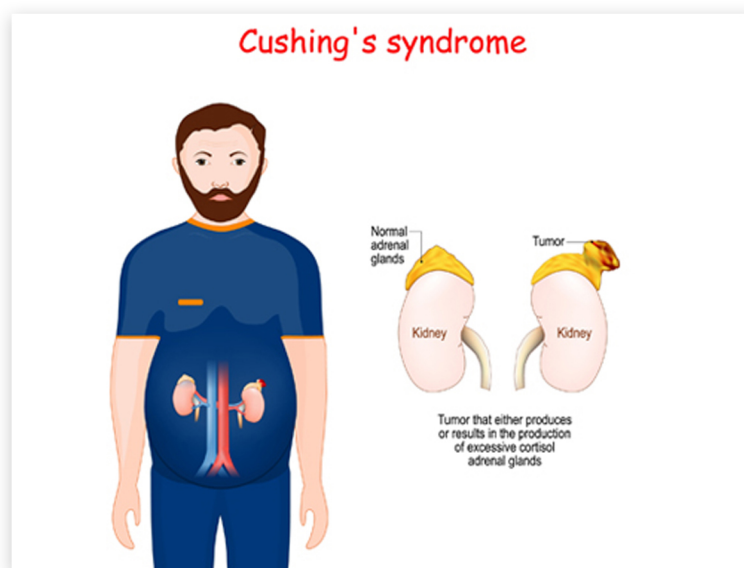


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What is Cushing's syndrome ?

Cushing's syndrome consists of the physical and mental changes that result from having too much cortisol in the blood for a long period of time.

What is cortisol?

Cortisol is a steroid hormone produced by the adrenal glands, located above the kidneys. In normal amounts, cortisol helps the body to respond to stress, maintain blood pressure and normal heart function, keep the immune system in check and convert fat, carbohydrates, and proteins into energy. Cortisol hormone is sometimes called the stress hormone as it helps the body to cope and respond to stress. This hormone is released from time to time based on body's requirements (eg during stress). It is released in a rhythmic pattern with the secretion being highest in the morning, decreasing as the day passes and reaching the lowest levels during night.

How do we know our cortisol levels are normal?

Cortisol levels are not routinely checked unless your doctor suspects symptoms or clinical findings suggestive of high or low cortisol levels. These are specialized tests and one needs to interpret it carefully

What happens when we have excess Cortisol hormone.?

Having excess cortisol can be harmful. It is termed as Cushing's Syndrome which can present with a constellation of symptoms like

Weight gain, especially in the upper body •

Rounded face and extra fat on the upper back and above the collarbones •

High blood sugar (diabetes) •

High blood pressure (hypertension) •

Thinning of bones (osteoporosis) •

Muscle loss and weakness •

Thin, fragile skin that bruises easily •

Purple-red stretch marks (usually over the abdomen and under the arms) •

Depression/ low mood •

Over time it can cause weight gain, Excess body hair and facial hair in women

What causes Cushing's syndrome?

Excess cortisol can be due to either intake of steroid medications for a prolonged period of time or when body itself produces excess cortisol due to certain pathological conditions. Such excess production can happen either from the adrenal gland or from a gland in the brain called pituitary gland (also called the master gland).

How is Cushing's syndrome diagnosed?

Cortisol levels are checked in the blood, urine or saliva in specific manner to diagnose excess production of cortisol in the body.

How is Cushing's syndrome treated?

Stopping the offending medications, if possible, would get rid of the symptoms of excess cortisol gradually over a period of time. For Cushing's syndrome caused by tumours in the adrenal or pituitary gland, the initial approach is almost always surgery to remove the tumor that is causing high cortisol levels. Although surgery is usually successful, some people may also need medications that lower cortisol levels or radiation therapy to destroy remaining tumor cells.

What happens if this condition is left untreated?

If left untreated, about 50% of the patients die at the end of 5 years due to complications, mainly related to the heart. Therefore treatment is quite essential.