

Cushing's Syndrome

A Patient's Guide to Cortisol, Symptoms, and Doctor Visits

Cushing's syndrome is caused by too much cortisol in the body, leading to a broad range of symptoms.^{1,2}

Overview of Cortisol

Cortisol is a hormone that plays many important roles in your body, such as responding to stress, maintaining blood sugar and blood pressure, and regulating the sleep-wake cycle.¹⁻³

Having too much cortisol can affect your entire body, including your¹:



Bones



Immune system
(which helps
fight sickness)



Heart and
blood vessels



Nervous system
(which controls how
you think and feel)

Recognizing and **recording** your symptoms is an important part of **relaying** information to your doctor so that you receive proper screening, diagnosis, and treatment for Cushing's syndrome.

Recognize



Record



Relay



Take note and track your symptoms over time on the following pages

Cushing's Syndrome Symptoms

Below are symptoms that may be caused by Cushing's syndrome.^{4,5} Read through the list and take note of which symptoms you may be experiencing.

Facial hair

Abnormal hair growth on the face, particularly in women (called hirsutism)

Menstrual irregularities

Any abnormal changes to the menstrual cycle, including no period, frequent periods, or infrequent periods



Poor concentration

Difficulty focusing or "brain fog"

Depression

Feeling sad often, loss of interest in activities, and fatigue

Irritability

Frustration, anger, and easily triggered annoyance

Poor memory

Difficulty recalling new information or remembering details

Fatigue

Often feeling tired or weak after sufficient rest

Insomnia

Difficulty falling and staying asleep at night

Flushed face

Red, puffy, or slightly swollen face

Acne

Oily skin and/or abnormal acne breakouts on the face

High blood pressure

A blood pressure reading of >130/80

High blood sugar

A blood sugar A1c level of >7.0%-7.5%

Decreased libido

Reduced sex drive

Excessive weight gain

Gaining more weight than usual over a short period of time, potentially with purple stretch marks (called striae)

Changes in weight distribution

Gaining excessive weight in the face, around the abdomen, and/or the upper back

Increased bruising

Bruises on arms, legs, or other areas, often with minimal trauma or cause

Poor wound healing

Slow healing of wounds due to thin and fragile skin

Infections

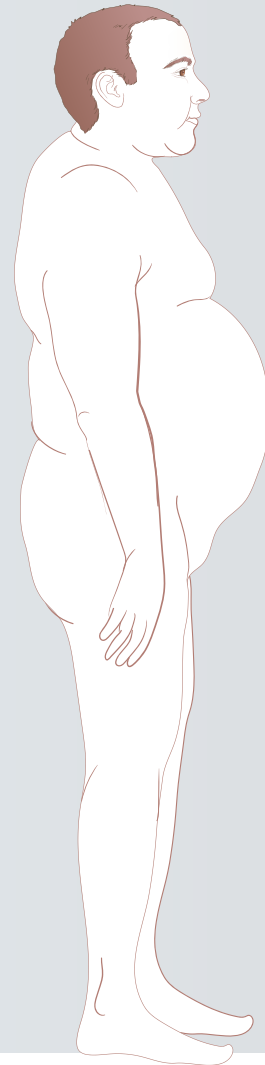
Invasion and growth of harmful germs inside the body

Edema

Swelling in the legs and feet

Erectile dysfunction

Difficulty getting or maintaining an erection



Note: The descriptions do not include every detail about each symptom.



Record

This section can be used to track your symptoms by filling out the table with the details of each symptom you experience in a given timeframe.

Measurable Symptoms (or Signs)

Symptoms that can be measured or verified through examination or tests, also called signs, are **objective**, such as the examples of symptoms listed in this section.

<input type="checkbox"/> Excessive weight gain	Weight gained: ____ lbs	Notes _____ _____ _____ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure		
<input type="checkbox"/> High blood sugar		
<input type="checkbox"/> Menstrual irregularities (females)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		

Experienced Symptoms

Subjective symptoms are things you feel or experience, like pain, tiredness or the others found on this page. Because they are subjective, it is important to tell your doctor when you experience them.

Examples of Physical Symptoms

<input type="checkbox"/> Moodiness	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased libido	Notes _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/> Erectile dysfunction	
<input type="checkbox"/> Insomnia	<input type="checkbox"/> Edema	
<input type="checkbox"/> Flushed face	<input type="checkbox"/> Infections	
<input type="checkbox"/> Acne (females)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Facial hair (females)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor wound healing		
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased bruising		

Note: You may not experience all of the symptoms listed here; any symptoms experienced beyond these lists can be noted after 'Other.'



Record (Cont'd)

Mental and Emotional Symptoms

Each month in your diary, describe any mental and/or emotional symptoms you have experienced.

Date: _____

- Poor concentration
- Depression
- Irritability
- Poor memory
- Other: _____

Diary Entry

Date: _____

- Poor concentration
- Depression
- Irritability
- Poor memory
- Other: _____

Diary Entry

Date: _____

- Poor concentration
- Depression
- Irritability
- Poor memory
- Other: _____

Diary Entry



Relay

Talking With Your Doctor

Since doctor's visits are short, writing down your symptoms can help you remember what to say. When you meet with your doctor, relay the symptoms that have the most impact on your daily life.

To spark a conversation with your doctor, here are some potential questions you can fill in and ask:

- "I have been experiencing _____ over _____ and _____. Are there tests you would recommend?"
list of symptom(s) for how long feelings/impact on life
- "I have already been treated with _____, which did not help my symptoms. Are there any other treatments you recommend?"
previous treatment(s)
- "I have been struggling with _____. Could this be related to high cortisol levels?"
mental/emotional symptom(s) from diary
- "I have read that high cortisol levels could be causing my _____. Are there any cortisol tests you recommend?"
list of symptom(s)
- "I have noticed _____ over _____. Could this be related to Cushing's syndrome?"
new symptom(s) for how long
- "I had surgery to treat my Cushing's syndrome. I have noticed _____. Could this be a sign that my Cushing's syndrome has returned?"
new symptom(s)

References: 1. Thau L, Gandhi J, Sharma S. Physiology, Cortisol. In: StatPearls. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing. Updated August 28, 2023. Accessed September 16, 2025. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK538239/>
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