



# UNDERSTANDING CORTISOL & YOUR METABOLIC HEALTH

There's a lot of information on social media about cortisol, but not all of it is accurate. Learn how cortisol affects your body and when it matters for your health.

## What is Cortisol?

Cortisol is a hormone made by your adrenal glands. It's often called the "stress hormone," but it also helps regulate many important body functions, such as:

- Blood sugar
- Blood pressure
- Metabolism (how your body uses energy)
- Sleep-wake cycles
- Immune function

Cortisol follows a natural daily rhythm. Levels are typically highest in the morning (to help you wake up) and lowest at night (to help you sleep). The body is designed to handle these normal fluctuations.

## How Does Cortisol Affect Metabolism?

Cortisol plays a role in how your body stores and uses energy. When levels are chronically and significantly elevated, they may contribute to:

- Higher blood sugars
- Insulin resistance
- Weight gain (especially in the abdomen)
- Increased appetite and cravings
- Difficulty losing weight

**Important:** Everyday stress does not usually cause harmful cortisol levels.

## Common Misconceptions

You may see claims that "high cortisol" is a common cause of weight gain or difficulty losing weight.

In reality, true cortisol disorders are rare, and most people with weight concerns do not have abnormal cortisol levels.

## Why Isn't Cortisol Routinely Tested?

Cortisol testing is not recommended for general concerns like weight or fatigue.

Here's why:

### 1. Levels change throughout the day

Sleep, stress, illness, and time of day all affect cortisol levels.

### 2. Random tests don't guide treatment

A single test does not provide reliable or actionable information.

### 3. Testing is only helpful when there is a specific medical concern

Cortisol testing is most helpful when there are signs or symptoms of specific medical conditions, such as Cushing's syndrome.

## When is Cortisol Tested?

Healthcare providers may test cortisol when symptoms suggest a condition like Cushing's syndrome, which may include:

- Rapid or unusual weight gain (especially in the abdomen and face)
- Easy bruising
- Purple stretch marks
- Muscle weakness
- Hard-to-control blood pressure
- New or worsening diabetes

In these cases, specialized tests, not random cortisol levels, are used to accurately assess cortisol production.

## Supporting Healthy Cortisol Levels

You can support your body's natural balance by:

- Getting consistent, quality sleep
- Managing stress (walking, breathing exercises, mindfulness)
- Staying physically active
- Eating balanced meals with protein and fiber

## Conclusion

Cortisol is important, but it's often misunderstood. For most people, it is not the main cause of weight concerns. Focusing on healthy daily habits like sleep, nutrition, and stress management can make a meaningful difference in overall health.