

Adrenal Insufficiency

Patient guide — living with low cortisol (Addison's disease, secondary adrenal insufficiency)

What Is Adrenal Insufficiency?

Adrenal insufficiency means your adrenal glands do not produce enough cortisol — your body's main stress hormone. Cortisol regulates blood pressure, blood sugar, inflammation, and helps your body respond to illness, injury, and surgery. Without it, these functions break down.

Your Daily Medications

- **Take your steroid replacement exactly as prescribed** — most patients take hydrocortisone 2–3 times daily or prednisone once daily.
- **Take your morning dose first thing when you wake up** — your body's cortisol is naturally highest in the morning.
- **Never skip doses** — missing doses can cause dangerous symptoms.
- **Do not stop suddenly** — always taper under doctor guidance if changes are needed.

Sick Day Rules — CRITICAL

■ **SICK DAY RULE: During any illness, surgery, or significant stress, you must DOUBLE or TRIPLE your steroid dose. Failure to do so can result in an adrenal crisis, which is life-threatening.**

Situation	Action
Fever, vomiting, diarrhea, significant pain	Double your daily dose. Call your doctor.
Minor surgery or dental procedure	Tell your surgeon and anesthesiologist. Usually need stress doses.
Major surgery or serious trauma	Require IV hydrocortisone. Alert medical team immediately.
Vomiting — cannot keep pills down	Use emergency injectable hydrocortisone (Solu-Cortef). Go to ER if needed.
Extreme stress (emotional trauma, grief)	Consider modest dose increase. Call your doctor.

Signs of Adrenal Crisis — Call 911 Immediately

- **Severe sudden weakness**
- **Severe abdominal, back, or leg pain**
- **Vomiting / diarrhea**
- **Low blood pressure / fainting**

- **Confusion or loss of consciousness**

Medical Alert

Wear a medical alert bracelet or carry a medical alert card at all times stating: "ADRENAL INSUFFICIENCY — In emergency, give 100 mg hydrocortisone IV or IM immediately." This can save your life if you are found unconscious.

My Information: My daily steroid: _____ mg | Timing: _____ | Emergency injectable: _____
available at: _____