



Nutrition for Patients with Cushing Syndrome

This information was developed to help you and your family understand how Cushing syndrome can affect your body's need for food and the role of a balanced diet for people with this disease.

How does Cushing syndrome affect nutrition?

Recently, people have become more aware of the benefits of a balanced diet and its relation to health. This relationship is especially important when illness occurs. During illness, as well as other times of stress, your body requires more nutrients than usual to help it heal. As a result, different nutrients or amounts of food may be needed to meet your body's needs.

Cushing syndrome changes your body's use of and need for fats, sodium, calcium, and sugar.

Will I gain weight if I have Cushing syndrome?

Most people with Cushing syndrome gain weight. The amount of weight gained varies with each person, but most people with this disease tend to become heavier in their mid-sections. Their arms and legs, however, usually remain the same size.

While people with Cushing syndrome may not be able to prevent some weight gain, their diets can be modified slightly so as to minimize it. They usually benefit from talking to a dietitian and eating a regular, well-balanced diet.

Can I lose the weight I gain with Cushing syndrome?

Once the nature of your Cushing syndrome is known, the dietitian can work with you to plan a diet that meets your special needs. Weight loss is possible once the disease is controlled, and the dietitian will discuss how diet can help you with this goal.

Will I need to change my diet?

Cholesterol

The cholesterol levels of most Americans are too high, and people have been recommended to reduce their daily cholesterol intake to 300 mg and their saturated fats to 10 percent of total calories. Although your disease may make it difficult for you to keep your cholesterol levels within a normal range, following the guidelines recommended for all Americans would still be a good idea for you. Your dietitian can acquaint you with using low-fat dairy products and how to limit fats in your diet (for example, changing your margarine and salad dressings).

Often, however, when your disease is better controlled, your cholesterol levels will come down.

Sodium

If you have or have had high blood pressure, you know it is important to limit the amount of sodium (salt) in your diet. Too much sodium also tends to promote fluid retention ("edema") and weight gain.

To prevent the effects of too much sodium, try to choose fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats prepared without added salt. Avoid using extra salt on food, and limit pickles, potato chips, and prepared salads (potato, cole slaw). Your dietitian can give you more information on reducing sodium in your diet.

Calcium

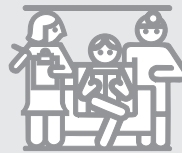
Although there is little medical research regarding how much calcium is needed by people with Cushing syndrome, it is a fact that they tend to develop thinning of the bones, known as “osteoporosis.” While doctors agree that it is difficult to replace all bone that has been lost through osteoporosis, it is possible to replace some of it and to preserve what is already present. Young patients can replace as much as 25 percent of lost bone. As a result, these daily quantities of calcium are recommended for all people, whether or not they have Cushing syndrome:

- ages 1-10: 800 mg
- ages 11-24: 1200 mg
- ages 24 and over: 800 mg.

Your dietitian can provide you with more details on your particular needs for calcium and how you can be sure to have the right amount in your diet.

Blood sugar

Sometimes, people with Cushing syndrome have elevated blood sugar levels (hyperglycemia), and they may need to take insulin or pills to control these levels. They may also need to follow a diet recommended for people with diabetes. High blood sugar levels usually resolve when the disease is under control. Your dietitian can help you plan a diet that will meet your needs while you and your doctor work to control Cushing syndrome.



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