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# Understanding cortisol

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## 1 What is cortisol?

Cortisol is produced by the adrenal glands and regulates metabolism, blood pressure and body immune function. It's also known as a life saving hormone. The level of cortisol is high in the morning and low in the evening and can be evaluated by a doctor through blood tests.

## 2 The stress part

"It's called stress hormone as it helps us to fight, flight and fright. Imagine a situation when you are on the terrace and a monkey jumps in front of you. The response will either be fight, flight or fright. This hormone helps us handle stressful situations," says Dr Ashish Sehgal, endocrinologist.

## 3 Mind the excess

"The hormone helps regulate blood sugar, blood pressure, metabolism, respond to inflammation. But if it's in excess, it can trigger anxiety, depression, digestive problems, headache, heart disease, sleep disorder and weight gain," says Dr Abhay Ahluwalia, endocrinologist.

## 4 Cushing disease

"The excessive presence of hormones can lead to a condition called cushing syndrome," says Dr Sehgal. Symptoms of cushing syndrome could be fatty deposits in the midsection and the face, causing a round face, acne, fatigue, weak muscles, skin fungal infections and diabetes.

## 5 Impact of Covid-19

Chronic stress, confrontation, illness, physiological issues are a few reasons for the high level of cortisol. "People are under emotional and mental stress in the pandemic and it's very likely that the level of cortisol has shot up," says Dr Richa Chaturvedi, endocrinologist.

## 6 Aiming for calm

Being less critical of one's self, removing toxic relationships from life, building a work routine and adopting a pet can help control cortisol, naturally. Meditating, chanting, relaxation exercises such as deep breathing, getting the right amount of uninterrupted sleep also helps.

## 7 The right diet

"Vitamin rich foods such as oranges, kiwi, berries, papaya, watermelon, milk, cheese, green vegetables, dark chocolate and fish oil help maintain cortisol levels. Also, reduce alcohol and caffeine. Herbs such as ashwagandha are also beneficial," says Archana Batra, dietitian.