



Guidelines for Stress Dosing & Sick Day Management

KEEP THIS GUIDE HANDY AND REVIEW REGULARLY

Healthy adrenal glands are able to release extra cortisol into the bloodstream when needed, helping the body cope with the demands of extreme physical and mental stress. People with adrenal insufficiency may need to take **extra cortisol** in addition to their daily doses when they are sick, injured, before surgery or when experiencing physical or emotional stress. This is called **stress dosing or sick day dosing**.

Keep the following stress dosing guidelines handy and review them regularly. With time, you will learn your own individual needs in various situations.

Stress	
Mild injury	Some individuals take a small dose of hydrocortisone for these events, but it is not universally required . The precise dosing is not known, but it should not exceed 4-10mg hydrocortisone*.
Exhausting, strenuous physical exercise if a person is not used to it (e.g. hiking, mountain climbing for several hours).	
Minor emotional or mental stress (eg: before an important exam)	
Major emotional or mental stress (eg: death of a close relative, witnessing a traumatic event)	Take an additional daily dose
Infection / Fever	
<i>Note: Infections are the most frequent cause of adrenal crisis, including gastroenteritis. Maintain the extra doses until recovery, then reduce to the standard doses within 1–2 days.</i>	
Fever of more than 38°C / 100.4°F	Double normal daily dose(s)
Fever of more than 39°C / 102.2°F	Triple normal daily dose(s)
Severe infections (eg: pneumonia)	If you are diagnosed with a severe infection, a hospital admission may be required and your doctor will initiate treatment or advise you how to stress-dose. The recommendations are: Initial 100mg hydrocortisone injection (by a physician) IV* Followed by 50mg every 6 hours until condition stabilises, then 2 or 3x normal dose
Vomiting / Diarrhoea	
<i>Note: Vomiting and diarrhoea pose a particularly high risk as the absorption of hydrocortisone is compromised while the demand for cortisol is increased.</i>	
Any illness that includes vomiting and/or diarrhoea	Triple normal daily dose(s), sip rehydration/electrolyte fluids. If vomiting persists and medication cannot be kept down, use emergency injection kit (100mg IM/SC hydrocortisone**). Then call a doctor / go to the nearest emergency department.
Severe sudden illness or injury	
<i>Note: Go to the nearest emergency department for hydrocortisone injection and fluids.</i>	
Severe illness or injury	Use emergency injection kit (100mg IM/SC hydrocortisone**). Then call a doctor / go to the nearest emergency department.

* Example brands for hydrocortisone are: Cortef, Hysone

** Example brands for soluble hydrocortisone are: Solu-Cortef, Solu-Medrol

Document last updated: 24 February 2020