

Getting to Know Your Adrenal Glands

Eating a healthy diet and getting enough sleep can help to reduce stress.

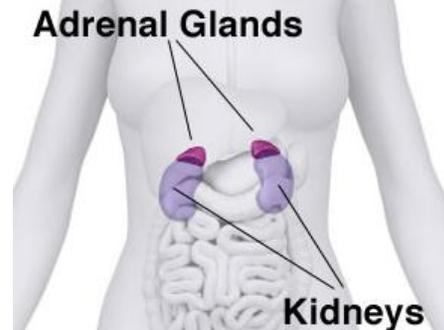
-Dr. Moosa



The adrenal glands are two glands that sit on top of your kidneys that are made up of two distinct parts:

The adrenal cortex—the outer part of the gland—produces hormones that are vital to life, such as cortisol (which helps regulate metabolism and helps your body respond to stress) and aldosterone (which helps control blood pressure).

The adrenal medulla—the inner part of the gland—produces nonessential (that is, you don't need them to live) hormones, such as adrenaline (which helps your body react to stress).



The Adrenal Glands are located on top of each kidney.

When you think of the adrenal glands (also known as suprarenal glands), stress might come to mind. And rightly so—the adrenal glands are arguably best known for secreting the hormone adrenaline, which rapidly prepares your body to spring into action in a stressful situation.

The adrenal glands contribute to your health even at times when your body isn't under extreme stress. In fact, they release hormones that are essential for you to live.

Disorders and Diseases of the Adrenal Glands

There are multiple reasons why the adrenal glands might not work as they should. The problem could be with the adrenal gland itself, or the root cause may be due to a defect in another gland.

Below are the most common disorders and diseases of the adrenal glands:

- **Addison's disease:** This rare disorder may affect anyone at any age. It develops when the adrenal cortex fails to produce enough cortisol and aldosterone. To learn more, read our article about Addison's Disease.
- **Adrenal cancer:** Adrenal cancer is an aggressive cancer, but it's very rare. Malignant adrenal tumors are rarely confined to the adrenal glands—they tend to spread to other organs and cause adverse changes within the body because of the excess hormones they produce.

- **Cushing's syndrome:** Cushing's syndrome is an uncommon condition that is essentially the opposite of Addison's disease. It is caused by overproduction of the hormone cortisol. There are a variety of causes of this disorder—a tumor in the adrenal gland or pituitary gland could be to blame. To learn more, read our article about Cushing's syndrome.
- **Congenital adrenal hyperplasia:** This genetic disorder is characterized by low levels of cortisol. It's common for people with congenital adrenal hyperplasia to have additional hormone problems such as low levels of aldosterone (which maintains a balance of water and salt).

The adrenal glands have a multi-functional role in the endocrine system. The two very different parts of these glands, the medulla and cortex, regulate and maintain many of your internal processes—from metabolism to the fight-or-flight response.

Ask your doctor to test your Adrenal Glands if you suspect you may have a deficiency.