

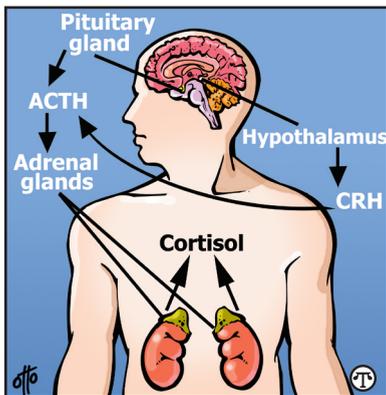


## Cushing's Disease: Common Symptoms, Rare Disease

(NAPSA)—Sometimes the simplest answer may not be the right one when it comes to health. When common symptoms point to a well-known cause, a more complicated underlying condition may be overlooked. Because of this, diagnosing rare diseases can be a challenge. For those affected by Cushing's disease, a rare endocrine disorder, many signs and symptoms, including weight gain, depression, diabetes, fatigue and high blood pressure, are indistinguishable at first glance from other health conditions and often misdiagnosed. To raise awareness, Cushing's Disease Awareness Day is celebrated annually on April 8—the birthday of Dr. Harvey Cushing, who was the first person to describe the disease.

Endocrine disorders occur when hormone levels are imbalanced. The most common endocrine disorder, diabetes, is associated with long-term complications that affect almost every part of the body. Though affecting only a small portion of the population, Cushing's disease, like diabetes, can have enduring effects on the body. There are currently 39 people per million living with Cushing's disease, while one to two people per million are diagnosed each year. It most commonly affects adults from 20 to 50 years old and affects women three to four times more often than men.

Cushing's disease is the most common form of Cushing's syndrome, a condition caused by excessive cortisol, a vital hormone



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that regulates metabolism, maintains cardiovascular function and helps the body respond to stress. In Cushing's disease, the overproduction of cortisol is triggered by a noncancerous pituitary tumor. However, no known causes or risk factors have been identified for the development of the tumors that cause Cushing's disease.

Since Cushing's disease can be difficult to recognize and the process for accurate diagnosis is often lengthy, the time to diagnosis for a patient can be up to six years from the time they first notice symptoms. Patients with Cushing's disease frequently see several doctors and undergo a variety of medical tests to accurately confirm a suspected diagnosis.

Lisa Wollman, from Massachusetts, knew that something was wrong beyond the simple symptoms. "Despite being active and

eating right, I started to gain weight and often felt extremely tired. It took several years of medical testing and frequent visits to many different doctors before I was properly diagnosed with Cushing's disease. I think it's essential for you to pay attention to your body and be aware of the many symptoms, which may seem unrelated or insignificant but could be the key to helping your physicians reach a diagnosis."

Although the symptoms of Cushing's disease are broad and diverse, there are some characteristics that may help distinguish Cushing's disease from other conditions, including rapid weight gain resulting in central obesity (abdomen that sticks out with thin arms and legs), having a "moon face" (round, red and full), purple stretch marks (striae), easy bruising and fractured bones.

Louise Pace, spokesperson for Cushing Support and Research Foundation, emphasizes the importance of disease awareness. "Living with a less common disorder like Cushing's disease can be difficult for patients. The level of understanding needs to grow among both patients and doctors."

To support Cushing's Disease Awareness Day and patients worldwide, use Twitter and Facebook to post online resources, such as [www.CushingsDisease.com](http://www.CushingsDisease.com), as well as information about the disease.

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