



Hypopituitarism

WHAT IS HYPOPITUITARISM?

Hypopituitarism (also called pituitary insufficiency) is a rare condition in which your pituitary gland doesn't make enough of certain hormones. Your body can't work properly when important glands, such as your thyroid gland and adrenal gland, don't get the hormones they need from your pituitary gland.

- Severe bleeding in the brain or severe blood loss during childbirth
- Tuberculosis or meningitis
- Certain conditions present at birth

Sometimes, the cause is unknown.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hypopituitarism can develop very slowly, over several months or even over several years.

WHAT IS THE PITUITARY GLAND AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

The pituitary gland is a pea-sized gland found at the base of your brain. It is called the "master gland" because it affects the action of many other important glands that produce their own hormones. The pituitary gland affects almost all parts of your body.

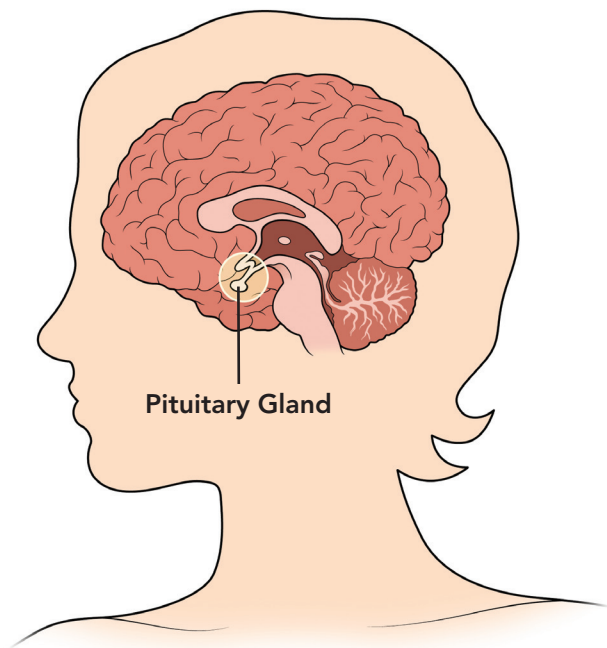
WHAT CAN CAUSE HYPOPITUITARISM?

Hypopituitarism can be caused by

- Tumors in or near the pituitary gland (which are usually benign, meaning not cancer)
- Radiation treatment for a tumor, which can destroy pituitary gland tissue
- Chemotherapy
- Brain surgery
- Traumatic brain injury, such as with a head injury from an accident

PITUITARY GLAND HORMONES AND WHAT THEY DO

Hormone	Function
Prolactin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulates production of breast milk after childbirth • May affect menstrual periods, sex drive, and fertility
Growth hormone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In children, stimulates growth • In adults, affects muscle mass, bone mass, and fat distribution
Adrenocorticotropin (ACTH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulates the adrenal glands to release cortisol, which helps maintain blood pressure and blood glucose (sugar) levels, especially during stress, illness, or injury
Thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulates the thyroid gland to make thyroid hormones, which regulate metabolism and energy balance
Luteinizing hormone (LH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulates ovulation in women and testosterone production in men
Follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulates estrogen production and egg development in women and sperm production in men
Antidiuretic hormone (ADH) (vasopressin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulates the amount of water the body releases in the urine
Oxytocin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps the flow of breast milk • Helps with labor during childbirth



WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR HYPOPITUITARISM?

Treatment usually includes taking the hormones you're missing, sometimes for life. Your doctor also will teach you how to take extra cortisone (a hormone) when you are sick or under stress. If a tumor is causing your hypopituitarism, you might need surgery to remove it and/or possibly radiation treatment. If needed, you can take medicine for infertility.

You will need to get regular check-ups. It's wise to wear medical identification, such as a bracelet or pendant, which provides information about your condition in case of an emergency.

WHAT IS THE LONG-TERM OUTLOOK FOR ME WITH HYPOPITUITARISM?

You can expect a normal life span, as long as you regularly take the medications recommended by your doctor.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HYPOPITUITARISM?

Symptoms can include one or more of the following:

- Stomach pain, decreased appetite, nausea and vomiting, and constipation
- Excessive thirst and urination
- Fatigue and/or weakness
- Anemia, meaning weakness from not having enough red blood cells
- Headache and dizziness
- Sensitivity to cold
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Stiffness in the joints
- In women: loss of armpit or pubic hair, decreased sex drive, infertility, problems with breast feeding, irregular or no menstrual periods, and hot flashes
- In men: loss of hair (on the face, or in the armpits or pubic area), decreased sex drive, infertility
- In children, problems with growth (including height) and sexual development

HOW IS HYPOPITUITARISM DIAGNOSED?

Your doctor will check your hormone levels with blood tests. You may have other tests, such as an MRI of your pituitary gland, to help find the cause of your hypopituitarism.

Questions to ask your doctor

- What tests do I need to find out what's wrong with my pituitary?
- Will my pituitary ever start working again?
- What medicines do I need to take?
- Do I need other types of treatment?
- How long will I need treatment?
- How often will I need check-ups and blood tests?
- If I get sick or have an emergency, how should I adjust the dose of medicine I take?

RESOURCES

- Find-an-Endocrinologist (Hormone Health Network): www.hormone.org/contact-a-health-professional/find-an-endocrinologist or call 1-800-HORMONE (1-800-467-6663)
- Hormone Health Network information about pituitary disorders: www.hormone.org/diseases-and-conditions/pituitary
- National Institutes of Health information about pituitary disorders: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/pituitarydisorders.html
- Mayo Clinic information about hypopituitarism: www.mayoclinic.com/health/hypopituitarism/DS00479

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The Hormone Health Network offers free, online resources based on the most advanced clinical and scientific knowledge from The Endocrine Society (www.endocrine.org). The Network's goal is to move patients from educated to engaged, from informed to active partners in their health care. This fact sheet is also available in Spanish at www.hormone.org/audiencias/pacientes-y-cuidadores.

