FACT SHEET

Adrenal Incidentaloma

WHAT IS AN ADRENAL INCIDENTALOMA?
An adrenal incidentaloma is an unsuspected tumor in one or both of your adrenal glands. This type of tumor is usually found by chance during an imaging test, such as an ultrasound or CT scan, for another condition. A tumor can be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous).

WHAT ARE THE ADRENAL GLANDS AND WHAT DO THEY DO?
You have two adrenal glands—one on top of each of your kidneys. Your adrenal glands make several important hormones. If your adrenal glands make too little or too much of these hormones, you can get sick.

DID YOU KNOW?
Your risk for an adrenal incidentaloma increases as you get older.

WHAT CAUSES AN ADRENAL INCIDENTALOMA?
There are a number of causes. Some causes can make your adrenal glands produce too much of a hormone. This type of tumor is called a hormonally active or functional tumor. Hormonally active causes include
• Cushing syndrome or subclinical hypercortisolism: conditions caused by too much cortisol
• Hyperaldosteronism: too much aldosterone
• A pheochromocytoma: a rare tumor in the adrenal glands that leads to too much epinephrine and norepinephrine
• Congenital adrenal hyperplasia: an inherited condition in which the adrenal glands make too little cortisol and aldosterone, and too much androgen
• Cancer of the adrenal gland with too much cortisol, adrenal androgens, and/or aldosterone

Other types of causes do not result in excess hormone production. This type of tumor is called a non-functional tumor. Causes include
• An adenoma (a non-cancerous tumor in the adrenal glands)
• Cancer of the adrenal gland or spread of cancer from elsewhere in the body

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<tr>
<th>ADRENAL HORMONES AND WHAT THEY DO</th>
<th>Function</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cortisol</strong></td>
<td>Helps the body cope with stress, illness, and injury. Helps regulate blood sugar (glucose) and blood pressure levels.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aldosterone</strong></td>
<td>Helps keep a proper balance of salt and water in the body. Regulates blood volume, blood pressure, and levels of potassium in the blood.</td>
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<td><strong>Adrenal androgens</strong></td>
<td>Contribute to pubic and armpit hair growth and body odor in men and women.</td>
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<td><strong>Epinephrine</strong> (adrenaline)</td>
<td>In response to fear, stress, or excitement, raises blood pressure, increases heart rate, helps the body take in oxygen, and increases blood supply to the muscles.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Norepinephrine</strong> (noradrenaline)</td>
<td>Helps with body function for regular activities.</td>
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WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AN ADRENAral INCIDENTALOMA?

Symptoms vary depending on whether the tumor is non-functional or functional, and which, if any, hormones are produced in excess.

Symptoms of too much cortisol can include
- Weight loss or weight gain (especially around the face and abdomen)
- Purplish skin stretch marks or skin that’s easily bruised
- Acne
- Muscle weakness
- Depression, anxiety, fatigue, and sleep disturbances
- In women, excess facial and body hair and/or irregular periods

High levels of cortisol can also cause high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and low bone density (when the tissue inside your bones starts to thin).

Symptoms of too much norepinephrine or epinephrine can include
- Fast or irregular heartbeat
- Sweating
- Severe headaches
- Shakiness
- Pale face

High levels of these hormones can also cause high blood pressure. High levels of aldosterone can cause high blood pressure, which can be life-threatening if not treated, and sometimes muscle weakness.

HOW IS AN ADRENAral INCIDENTALOMA EVALUATED?

Your doctor will evaluate your tumor to identify its cause and hormone production. This may include
- Your medical history
- A review of your symptoms
- A physical exam: a check of your blood pressure, pulse rate, body weight, and other signs
- Blood and/or urine tests to check hormone levels and to rule out phaeochromocytomas
- Results of genetic tests (as needed)

Questions to ask your doctor
- What caused my tumor?
- What tests do I need?
- What are my options for treatment?
- What are the risks and benefits of each treatment option?
- How long will I need treatment?
- How often will I need check-ups?
- Should I see an endocrinologist?

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)
- The Urology Care Foundation: www.urologyhealth.org/urology/index.cfm?article=89