

Health & Wellness

February
2026

Issue 17

Cortisol

This month's Health & Wellness topic is **Cortisol**. For this issue, we're going over what cortisol is, how it helps different parts of your body, what are symptoms of irregular levels, and how to keep your cortisol levels balanced.



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Welcome to DuPage Senior Citizens Council/Kane Senior Council's February Health & Wellness Newsletter!

We're here to bring you a new topic relating to wellness as well as new brain teasers, seasonal recipes, book recommendations, and more!

Providing Meals and More...



DuPage Senior
Citizens Council



Kane Senior
Council



Health & Wellness Education

Cortisol

Introduction

Cortisol is a steroid hormone that your adrenal glands make. Cortisol affects several aspects of your health and helps regulate your body's response to stress.



Your body continuously monitors your cortisol levels to maintain **steady levels** - a term called **homeostasis**. High or low cortisol levels can be harmful to your health.

Information adapted from:

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22187-cortisol>

What is Cortisol?

Cortisol is an **essential hormone** that affects **almost every organ and tissue** in your body. It plays many important roles, including:

- Regulating how your body uses **glucose** for energy
- Decreasing **inflammation**
- Regulating **blood pressure**
- Helping control your **sleep-wake cycle**

Cortisol affects nearly every organ system in your body and it helps regulate several key functions.

Your body releases cortisol when you experience **stress**, including:

- **Acute** (short-term) stress
- **Chronic** (long-term) stress
- **Traumatic** stress

During times of stress, your body can release cortisol after releasing “fight or flight” **hormones** like adrenaline.

Cortisol affects your metabolism by helping **regulate** how your body uses **glucose** (sugar) for **energy**.

Cortisol also acts on other bodily **tissues** to manage glucose use, including:

- Adipose tissue (body fat)
- Liver
- Muscle
- Suppressing inflammation

In short spurts, cortisol can boost your **immunity** by **limiting inflammation**. But if you have consistently **high levels** of cortisol, your body can get used to it. This can lead to **inflammation** and a **weakened immune system**.

Regulating blood pressure

Elevated levels of cortisol can cause **high blood pressure**. **Lower-than-normal** levels of cortisol can cause **low blood pressure**.

If you have high levels of cortisol (hypercortisolism) for a long time, it's usually a disease called

Cushing Syndrome.

Causes of high cortisol levels and Cushing Syndrome include:

- Taking **high doses** of corticosteroid medications
 - i.e. prednisone, prednisolone, or dexamethasone
- **Tumors** that produce **Adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH)** - usually in your pituitary gland
- **Adrenal gland tumors** that cause excess cortisol

Symptoms of high cortisol levels, or Cushing syndrome, can include:

- **Weight gain**, especially in your face and belly
- **Fatty deposits** between your shoulder blades
- Wide, purple **stretch marks** on your belly
- **Muscle weakness** in your upper arms and thighs
- **High blood sugar**, which often turns into Type 2 diabetes
- **High blood pressure**
- Excessive **hair growth** (hirsutism) in females
- **Weak bones** (osteoporosis) and **bone breaks** (fractures)

Lower-than-normal cortisol levels (hypocortisolism)

is often called **Adrenal Insufficiency.**

There are **two types** of adrenal insufficiency: **primary and secondary**

Primary adrenal insufficiency most often happens when your **immune system** attacks your adrenal glands (**Addison's Disease**). An infection or blood loss to the tissue in your adrenal glands can also lead to a lack of cortisol

Secondary adrenal insufficiency happens if you have an **underactive pituitary gland** (hypopituitarism) or a pituitary tumor. These conditions can **limit ACTH production**, which limits **cortisol production**. You can also develop low cortisol levels after suddenly stopping treatment with corticosteroids.

Symptoms of low cortisol levels, or adrenal insufficiency, can include:

- Fatigue
- Unintentional weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Low blood pressure

How can I

REDUCE my cortisol levels?

If you have Cushing syndrome, you'll need **medical treatment** to lower your cortisol levels. Treatment usually involves **medication** and/or **surgery**.

Otherwise, there are several ways to help lower your cortisol levels, including:

- Get quality **sleep**. Chronic sleep issues, like insomnia or working a night shift, can cause higher cortisol levels
- Regular **physical activity** helps improve sleep quality and reduce stress.
- Controlled **breathing** helps stimulate your parasympathetic nervous system.
- **Laughing** promotes the release of endorphins and suppresses cortisol.

Key Nutrients

that can help reduce cortisol levels include:

- **Omega-3s**: fish, walnuts, olive oil
- **Vitamin C**: citrus fruits, broccoli, bell peppers
- **Vitamin E**: almonds, sunflower seeds, avocados
- **Vitamin A/beta carotene**: carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach
- **Selenium**: chicken, Brazil nuts, eggs, brown rice
- **Zinc & manganese**: found in a variety of whole foods

WRAP UP

Diet alone will not resolve stress-related cortisol issues, but it can be an important part of a broader strategy.

Approaches such as **mindful eating** may show more immediate benefits, since they target **stress-driven eating** behaviors directly.

For more health and wellness tips, information and resources, visit our website.



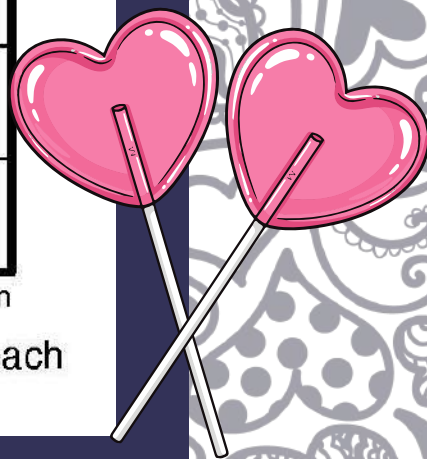
BRAIN BOOSTERS

SUDOKU

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8		9	1			6	7	
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9					7	4		

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Fill in the blank squares so that each row, each column and each 3-by-3 block contain all of the digits 1 thru 9.



RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

*I sometimes run but I can't
walk. What am I?*

WORD SEARCH

E	R	V	H	K	E	L	P	L	W	C	S	A	Z
X	E	S	O	S	C	H	O	R	M	O	N	E	A
X	R	T	X	W	C	X	Q	K	A	I	M	S	M
H	S	E	N	M	W	A	D	R	E	N	A	L	A
O	K	R	I	F	N	U	X	C	E	C	S	Z	L
M	B	O	Q	E	T	M	A	J	S	U	E	V	O
E	H	I	L	Z	Y	N	W	C	S	S	C	R	M
O	C	D	L	A	N	F	B	O	E	H	O	G	G
S	G	L	A	N	D	S	D	R	N	I	N	L	F
T	Z	R	G	O	T	R	T	T	T	N	D	K	K
A	M	A	V	K	M	T	L	I	I	G	A	S	B
S	P	Q	K	J	G	V	D	S	A	D	R	T	Q
I	U	Z	W	Y	C	E	O	O	L	S	Y	M	F
S	P	R	I	M	A	R	Y	L	V	Y	F	L	B

WORD BANK

CORTISOL

ADRENAL

PRIMARY

STEROID

GLANDS

SECONDARY

HORMONE

CUSHING

HOMEOSTASIS

ESSENTIAL



Our Picks of the Month

February Recipe: Lazy Shepherd's Pie

Ingredients:

- ½ (13 oz) box of instant mashed potatoes (follow instructions on box)
- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 (12 oz) bag frozen mixed veggies
- 1 (10.75 oz) can tomato soup
- 1 (1.5 oz) packet of beef stew seasoning
- 1-2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- ½ cup water



Recipe from: The Lazy Dish

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F
2. Prepare the mashed potatoes according to the package directions.
3. Brown the ground beef on medium heat in a large skillet; drain any excess grease
4. Add the can of tomato soup, frozen mixed veggies, beef stew seasoning mix and ½ cup of water to the browned beef; stir and simmer for 5-10 minutes on low heat
5. Spread the ground beef mixture onto the bottom of a greased 9x13 baking dish, evenly spread the prepared mashed potatoes over top, and then sprinkle with cheese.
6. Bake uncovered in the center rack for about 30 minutes, or until the cheese starts to brown

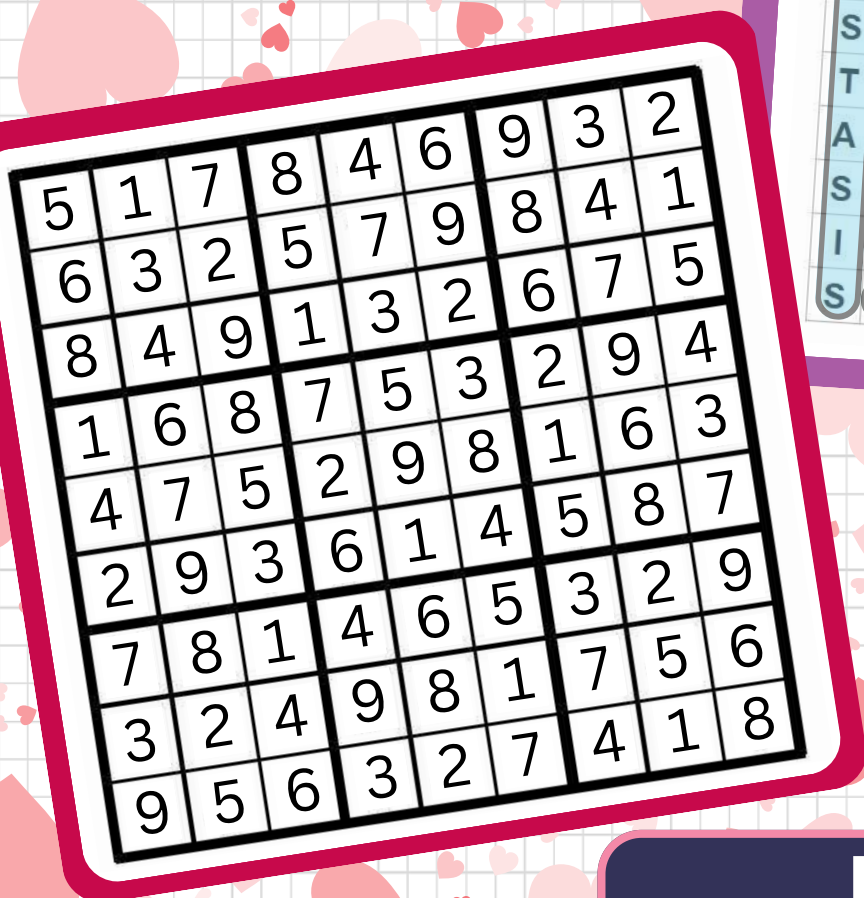
Our Book Pick of the Month

Before the Coffee Gets Cold by Toshikazu Kawaguchi

A cafe in Japan allows people to travel back in time to address the issues of their past - however, they can only remain in the past for as long as it takes for a cup of coffee gets cold.



ANSWER KEY



Riddle Answer:

*I can sometimes run, but I can't walk.
What am I?*

Answer: A nose

Print Monthly Meal Menus at:

www.DuPageSeniorCouncil.org/Home-Delivered-Meals-Menus

www.KaneSeniorCouncil.org/Meals-On-Wheels



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