

LIVING WITH ADDISON'S DISEASE



An owner's manual for individuals with the disease

INTRODUCTION

Addison's disease is a rare chronic condition brought about by failure of the adrenal glands. Life-long, continuous treatment with steroid replacement therapy is required. This aims to replicate the necessary amounts of the missing hormones - cortisol and aldosterone - that the individual can no longer produce from the adrenal glands. With the right balance of daily medication, most people with Addison's disease are able to continue life much as it was before their illness.

This guide has been co-written by Sarah Baker and Katherine White, members of the UK Addison's Disease Self-Help Group, in collaboration with endocrinologist, Professor J A H Wass. It aims to provide you with sufficient information to allow you to work well with your doctors in fine-tuning steroid replacement therapy, and in making informed choices about some of the practicalities of managing the condition. A glossary of the terms and references used in the manual starts on page 21.

In common with fellow Addisonians, you will learn to manage your own health day-to-day. At some stage, you may experience illnesses or other situations requiring significant, short-term adjustments in medication. You will need to take extra medication if you get a serious infection or injury. Without this extra medication, you could experience potentially life-threatening symptoms known as an Addisonian crisis. This guide aims to help with both the everyday and the more unusual challenges that Addisonians can experience.

This guide is addressed principally to UK residents and reflects UK medical practices. Please remember that the information it provides is intended as a supplement to, not a substitute for, the advice of your doctor who knows the details of your medical history. Individual responses to the condition can vary widely and, in some instances, individuals may have experienced symptoms needing differing treatment to that described here.

Many of the specific issues addressed in this guide were raised in the most recent UK survey of the Addison's Disease Self-Help Group (ADSHG), conducted in 1996/7. The full results of that survey can be found on the ADSHG website listed in section 11.

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