

ACTH deficiency arises as a result of decreased or absent production of adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) by the pituitary gland. A decline in the concentration of ACTH in the blood leads to a reduction in the secretion of adrenal hormones, resulting in adrenal insufficiency (hypoadrenalism). Adrenal insufficiency leads to weight loss, lack of appetite (anorexia), weakness, nausea, vomiting, and low blood pressure (hypotension). Because these symptoms are so general, the diagnosis is sometimes delayed or missed entirely. For that reason, some clinicians believe the disorder to be more common than previously thought. Symptoms of ACTH deficiency most often occur in adults, but the disorder may also be diagnosed in infancy. The disorder affects males and females in equal numbers. When ACTH deficiency is suspected, blood samples are taken for analysis, especially of the level of cortisol in the blood. Cortisol is the name of one of the hormones produced by the outer portion (cortex) of the adrenal glands. If the concentration of cortisol is low, it typically indicates a low concentration of ACTH. On occasion, an ACTH stimulation test may be administered.