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No, You Don't Have "Cortisol Face"

Don't be fooled by social media—here's what doctors want you to know.

By [Samantha Holender](#) 13 September 2024



My face has always been a bit cherub-like: round cheeks, a circle shape, and a soft jawline. But when I was in my early 20s, my face changed—it puffed out to the point that it resembled a near-perfect circle; it didn't look normal or healthy.

Here, I spoke with board-certified dermatologist [Paul Jarrod Frank, MD](#), to debunk the hype around the so-called “cortisol face.”

What Is Cortisol?

When it's functioning normally, cortisol is a good thing (despite the bad rap it's receiving on TikTok). “Cortisol has several positive functions,” says [Dr. Frank](#), noting that it can keep inflammation down and regulate blood pressure. It's when levels are elevated for a prolonged period of time that the body gets out of whack.

What Is "Cortisol Face?"

But it's important to understand that “moon face” is not the same as a run-of-the-mill puffiness or a round face shape. If you're looking a little puffy, it could be due to many factors, including weight gain, salt consumption, and alcohol, explains [Dr. Frank](#). Medical conditions, like PCOS, can also contribute to facial puffiness.

What Causes “Cortisol Face?”

True “moon face” may be the result of many factors, such as:

- **Stress:** Similarly, stress can play a role in raising cortisol levels—but it won’t singlehandedly cause "cortisol face." Rather, it’s just “a piece of the puzzle and not the sole cause,” says **Dr. Frank**.

How Do I Know If I Have “Cortisol Face?”

The bottom line is this: “You cannot look at someone and tell if they have cortisol face,” explains **Dr. Frank**. “People have varying degrees of face shapes. If you notice changes in your face, cortisol can contribute, but you typically can’t tell from across the room.”