

## Is it safe to use growth hormones to treat unusually short children? Here are the pros and cons

Experts estimate that 60 percent to 80 percent of children who are short for their age do not have a growth hormone deficiency or other medical condition that limits growth. But knowing there's a therapy available to increase height, some parents seek a medical solution for a perceived problem, even when there is no medical abnormality. They should also know, however, that new research has linked growth hormone treatment to serious adverse health effects years later.

Undue shortness may have many causes in addition to a deficiency of growth hormone, including malnutrition, Crohn's disease or celiac disease, and potential medical conditions should be ruled out or, if present, treated. But height is most often related to the child's genetics.

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[A JAMA Pediatrics study shows] that among 3,408 patients who were treated with recombinant growth hormone as children and adolescents and followed for up to 25 years, [the risk of developing a cardiovascular event](#) like a heart attack or stroke was two-thirds higher for men and twice as high for women than among 50,036 untreated but otherwise similar people.

[Another report shows] [that growth hormone promotes biomedical pathways](#) that stimulate the development of atherosclerosis, the basis for most cardiovascular events.

Not yet known is whether other long-term adverse effects will become apparent in the years ahead.

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