

Treatment with steroids



Information for patients

Diabetes Service



PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



This leaflet should be read alongside other patient information leaflets if they are relevant to your condition. Examples include 'Use of steroids in neurological conditions' and 'Steroids for lung disease'.

What are steroids?

Steroids (or corticosteroids) are produced naturally in the body by the adrenal glands. Steroid tablets replace or increase the body's supply of steroids. They reduce inflammation and allergic symptoms.

Common forms of steroid tablet include prednisolone, dexamethasone, methyl prednisolone, deflazacort and hydrocortisone.

When and how do I take steroids?

- Take the medication as prescribed by your doctor. This will usually be once a day in the morning, with or after food. Occasionally steroids are given twice daily.
- **Never** stop taking steroids without first speaking to your doctor.
- When taking steroids, you should carry a Steroid Card, which keeps a record of your dose and duration of steroid treatment.

What are the possible side effects?

Steroid side effects are more likely at higher doses taken for longer periods.

Common side effects include: increased appetite, weight gain, high blood pressure, round face, thinning of skin, easy bruising, indigestion and changes in mood.

Diabetes

Steroids can cause blood sugar levels to rise and diabetes may develop. High blood sugars can make you feel very thirsty and can make you pass urine more often. Tiredness, weight loss and thrush are other symptoms of diabetes. If you develop symptoms of diabetes you should

contact your doctor in the next few days and more urgently if you feel unwell.

Your blood sugar level and an average blood sugar test (HbA1c) will be checked before you start steroids. These tests will be repeated one month after starting steroids and every 3 months after that.

If you are on high dose steroids you may be asked to monitor your own blood sugar levels once daily before your evening meal. After a few weeks you may need to check less often; once or twice a week or if you feel unwell. If your blood sugar levels rise above 12mmol/L you should make an urgent appointment to see your GP. You should seek immediate advice if your blood sugars are high and you are feeling very unwell or vomiting.

If you have diabetes already, you are likely to need an increase in your diabetes medication; please contact your GP or diabetes team. Request an urgent appointment if you are feeling very thirsty or unwell or if you monitor your blood sugar levels and these are above 12mmol/L for 48 hours.

If steroid treatment is reduced or stopped, it is likely that diabetes treatment will also need to be reduced or stopped. You will need to discuss this with the person who you see for your diabetes.

Infection

Steroids can make you more prone to infection but may hide some of the signs of infection. If you become unwell or develop a temperature while taking steroids, you should report to your doctor immediately. If you have not had chickenpox or measles and become exposed to someone with either, you should also report this to your doctor immediately.

Other side effects

Long-term use of steroids can cause or worsen glaucoma, cataracts and osteoporosis (thinning of bones). If you need to take steroids for more than a few weeks, your doctor may need to prescribe 'bone-protection' drugs that help prevent osteoporosis.

If you develop any new symptoms after starting steroids, you should consult your doctor.

What should I monitor?

You may need to monitor your blood sugar levels. You do not need to perform any other regular monitoring unless you are asked to by your doctor. However, your doctor will check your weight, your blood pressure and your cholesterol and potassium levels before you start steroids and regularly while you are taking them.

Remember

- **Always carry your Steroid Card.**
- **Never stop steroids abruptly.**
- **Never give your medication to others even if their condition and medication appears to be the same as yours.**
- **Keep all medicines out of reach of children.**



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