

## TIPS

- Take steroids in the morning to avoid insomnia
- Take them with a meal or milk to reduce the stomach upset
- Notify any doctor or dentist who sees you that you are taking or have recently been on steroids.
- Never stop steroids abruptly if more than a few days treatment has been taken. They should be weaned.

**Report any side effects to your doctor.**



Your steroid tablet is \_\_\_\_\_

You should take the following doses:

	DOSE	Number of days
Then		
Then		
Then		
Then		
Then		

Prednisolone tablets are 1mg, 5mg or 25mg  
Dexamethasone tablets are 4mg

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**Produced to assist patients taking steroids to understand the drug, its effects, side effects and how to minimise problems.**

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# Steroid Therapy



An information brochure for  
patients taking steroid  
treatment

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## Steroids

Steroids are natural hormones produced by the body. They are used in larger doses in the treatment of many disorders. There are 3 types of steroids - we are concentrating on the corticosteroids - **prednisolone (or prednisone), dexamethasone and hydrocortisone.**

Steroids are potent drugs with many beneficial effects. Unfortunately there are side effects also. This brochure informs you of the major effects and side effects and how to minimise these.

## Effects of steroids

- Anti-inflammatory
- Immune suppression: to treat auto-immune disorders, eg ITP or autoimmune haemolysis
- Treatment of lymphoma, lymphoid leukaemias (eg CLL, ALL), myeloma.
- Helps reduce nausea and vomiting in combination with other anti-sickness drugs in chemotherapy patients.

## Side effects

This is a long list. The chance of developing some of the effects depends on the length of time that steroids are needed for. We try to minimise the dose and duration of steroid therapy to minimise the unwanted side effects. Not everyone will develop all the side effects and some people develop none of them. Often steroids are used in short courses of 5 days, which is associated with relatively few adverse effects.

### The main side effects are:

- Mood swings: feeling "high" or good on the tablets and then "down" or flat and grumpy after stopping. Some people develop more marked mental/psychiatric changes ("madness").
- Fluid retention: this causes some swelling of the ankles, which settles on ceasing the drug
- Insomnia: this effect is reduced by taking the tablets in the morning
- Gastric upset (indigestion) or ulcer: sometimes a drug to prevent ulcers is required to help with this.
- High blood sugar: this is more common with prolonged therapy. Diabetes will also be harder to control, and may need higher doses of their diabetic drugs.
- High blood pressure (hypertension): not usually a problem with short courses

### Side effects with long-term use:

High blood pressure (hypertension); osteoporosis; muscle weakness; diabetes; delayed wound healing; thinning of the skin; increased fat around the neck and abdomen; increased susceptibility to infection (particularly thrush)

## Ceasing steroids

Steroid treatment replaces the body's own production of steroids. On ceasing steroids abruptly the body takes some days to recommence its production and this can lead to severe illness which can be life-threatening due to lack of steroids. If steroids have been taken for more than a few days they must never be stopped abruptly. The dose will be weaned to gradually come off the drug. Full instructions will be provided if this is necessary. Five day therapy does not usually require weaning.



Some individuals develop "steroid withdrawal" effects after stopping steroids, even after only a few days treatment. This can cause aches and pains, lethargy, being very moody or grumpy. If this occurs then the course of steroids can be tapered off over a few more days to "soften the landing" of coming off steroids.