



STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
DEPARTMENT OF OTOLARYNGOLOGY-HEAD & NECK SURGERY

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Patient Information On

ORAL CORTICOSTEROIDS

What are corticosteroids?

Oral corticosteroids or “steroids” are anti-inflammatory medicines. Examples are prednisone, dexamethasone and methylprednisolone.

They are not the same as the “anabolic steroids” body builders use. Corticosteroids treat inflammation in many illnesses like asthma, arthritis, and allergic reactions. Your ENT doctor may prescribe oral steroids for sinus disease, sudden hearing loss, airway swelling, nerve paralysis, or inflammation after surgery.

How should I take this medicine?

- Follow the dosing instructions carefully. Often the number of pills will be “tapered” or decrease over time. If you are to take more than one pill a day, take all of the pills together in a single dose rather than dividing the doses. Do not stop the medicine without telling your doctor.
- Take the pills with food or milk if you experience an upset stomach.
- When you see other doctors, mention that you have taken oral steroids up to a year after you have finished the medicine.

What should I tell my doctor before taking oral steroids?

Discuss all allergies, medications and supplements. Also discuss if you have ever had:

- *Diabetes*
- *Depression or mood disorders*
- *Glaucoma or cataracts*
- *Blood thinners*
- *Tuberculosis*
- *Osteoporosis*
- *High blood pressure*
- *Stomach ulcers*

What are common possible side effects?

Although many patients experience no side effects from oral steroids, the most common side effects are stomach irritation, temporary mood changes (elevated or depressed), mild weight gain, easy bruising, high blood sugar, high blood pressure or difficulty sleeping. These side effects typically resolve once the medication has been completed. If you are on once-a-day dosing of steroids, minimize insomnia by taking the full dose of steroids in the morning.

What are rare but important side effects?

Most patients don’t get severe side effects, and when they do, it is usually only after sustained, chronic use of steroids rather than short courses. Though rare, please notify your doctors if you think you may be experiencing any of the following:

- **Severe mood changes** – depression, suicidal thoughts, paranoia, hallucinations, aggression or mania.
- **Vision changes or eye discomfort** – may be signs of cataracts or increased eye pressure.
- **New infections** – steroids can re-activate old infections such as tuberculosis or shingles.
- **Hip pain** – low blood flow to the hip can cause severe bone disease.
- **Low adrenal hormones** – certain natural hormones may become too low when stopping steroid pills after an extended period of usage. This may be due to suppression of adrenal gland function by the steroid pills. Symptoms are vomiting, very low blood pressure, extreme weakness, severe drowsiness or even coma.

What if I have more questions?

One sheet cannot fully describe any medication. You can read more on the FDA website www.fda.gov. You can also contact our office for any questions or concerns.

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