

Steroid Education Sheet

Steroids are used to reduce or prevent inflammation and decrease immune responses. They also can be used to treat some cancers.

How to take steroids:

*Take with food to avoid stomach upset.

*Take in the morning to coincide with the body's natural cortisol secretion cycle.

POTENTIAL SIDE EFFECTS

System	Side Effects	What to do
Skin	Thinned skin. Easy bruising. Slow wound healing. Sweating. Acne-like rash. Facial redness. Facial hair.	Avoid trauma and sun exposure. Keep skin clean, dry and moisturized.
Gastrointestinal	Stomach irritation (caution with history of ulcers). Stimulated appetite.	Report stomach pain and/or heartburn to medical team. Report black, tarry stools. Do not take with Aspirin or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications.
Muscle	Achiness. Muscle weakness. Loss of muscle size.	Physical activity to maintain muscle strength.
Cardiovascular	High blood pressure. Swelling. Weight gain. Cushingoid appearance: Neck, facial and abdominal fullness.	Low sodium diet. May need medications to decrease blood pressure and reduce edema.
Blood Sugar	Increased blood sugar.	May require insulin to control elevated sugars. Nutrition/Diabetic Education.
Emotional	Personality changes. Depression. Anxiety. Insomnia. <i>**See below for details.</i>	Report to medical team. Include caregiver in discussions.
Bones	Osteoporosis. Avascular necrosis.	Report new bone pain. Take Calcium/Vitamin D.
Eyes	Blurred vision. Cataracts. May worsen glaucoma.	See eye doctor for worsening blurred vision and to monitor glaucoma.
Immune System	May mask symptoms of infection. May increase risk for development of infections.	Avoid contact with ill persons. Report fever, chills, cough, increased fatigue, dizziness, pain with urination, frequent urination.
Adrenal Gland Insufficiency	Muscle aches. Fatigue. Nausea. Low blood pressure. Headache.	Report these symptoms to medical team. Never stop steroids abruptly as they must be tapered down. Inform new/other medical providers if you have taken steroids within the last year, especially if you need surgery.

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Additional Information about Potential Psychological Effects

- Emotional and social side effects of steroids can be **unpredictable**. Research estimates vary widely, but suggest that between 2 - 57% of people experience these side effects.
- Up to 6% of patients experience severe psychiatric side-effects including mania, depression, psychosis, delirium, and obsessive-compulsive syndrome.
- These psychological difficulties, even if at relatively low levels, can cause relationship challenges and can lead to frustration, poor communication, and fear.
- A pre-existing mental illness does not necessarily predict psychiatric side effects from steroids. *However, if someone has pre-existing symptoms or a pre-existing vulnerability for mental health problems, steroids can potentially make them worse.*
- Psychiatric side effects can emerge at the start of treatment and often get better after the steroid is discontinued; however, these side effects can sometimes first emerge after the medication is stopped.
- **Inform your doctor** if you or a loved one notices concerning emotional, social, or psychological changes. Different treatments are available, including medication-based treatments and treatments not involving medication (such as therapy).