

Systemic (Oral) Steroids

Introduction and Dosing

Steroids are a type of hormone made by our bodies. Certain types of steroids are used for medical problems including arthritis, asthma and rashes. They can also be used to treat diseases related to the Ears, Nose & Throat, such as: nasal polyps, swelling of the aero digestive tract, some forms of hearing loss, dizziness and when oral steroids are taken, the body's natural production of steroids decreases. If oral steroids are discontinued suddenly, the body may not have sufficient time to respond and increase its natural steroid production back up to the normal rate. Therefore, your steroid prescription is written so that you will slowly decrease your daily steroid dose (i.e. tapering) prior to stopping completely. It is recommended that you take your steroids on a full stomach after breakfast in the morning. This will help to prevent possible side effects such as stomach irritation and insomnia.

It is not infrequent to have some increased appetite or to retain some fluid when you are on oral steroid therapy. You should therefore watch your diet. An initial high dose may also make you feel hyperactive, and you may feel somewhat down as the dose is decreased. However, with appropriate management of the steroid dosage, these effects can usually be minimized.

If you are on oral steroids for long periods of time, it will be necessary for you to increase your steroid dose (steroid boost) if you develop a significant infection. Your doctor will inform you how to do this. Patients on long term steroids should also increase their dose if they have surgery or are involved in a major accident. Some patients may, therefore, wish to wear a medic-alert bracelet. Finally, individuals at risk for osteoporosis, especially women who have undergone menopause, should have a bone density study performed every 1-2 years if they are on long term steroids. An annual ophthalmologic (eye) examination is also recommended. In general, systemic steroids should be avoided during pregnancy or if you have a history of a bleeding abnormality, tuberculosis (TB), glaucoma, significant clinical depression, or an immune deficiency. If you have a history of a duodenal ulcer, you should inform your doctor and he will prescribe some medication to protect your stomach.

Adverse Effects

Cataracts, glaucoma, high-blood pressure, high blood sugar (as with diabetes), mood changes, insomnia, stomach irritation, nausea, ulcer disease, bone-thinning (osteoporosis) and menstrual irregularities may occur with oral steroid use. Thus, if you have a history of any of these problems, be sure to inform your doctor.

A serious but very rare adverse reaction to oral steroids (avascular necrosis) can result in permanent damage to an affected joint. Fortunately, this is very uncommon. However, you should inform your physician if you develop significant joint pains while taking oral steroids. **Do not stop your steroid medication suddenly without consulting your**

physician. If you take other medications, check with your family doctor or your pharmacist to make sure there are no unusual drug interactions.

We hope you find this information helpful. Ask your pharmacist for an instruction brochure. Please contact our office if you have any questions.