

CORTICOSTEROIDS

dexamethasone, fludrocortisone, hydrocortisone, methylprednisolone, prednisone, prednisolone



Other names: Apo-Prednisone®, Florinef®, Medrol®, Redipred®

Important note: The following information is intended to add to, not replace, the knowledge and judgment of your doctor, pharmacist or other health care professional.

Why are you taking this medicine?

Corticosteroids (steroids) are used to reduce inflammation and suppress the immune system. They are used for conditions where inflammation occurs, for example: breathing conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD); polymyalgia rheumatica, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and inflammatory bowel disease such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.

When to take this medicine

Corticosteroids are best taken at meal times (with food) to minimise stomach upset. Steroids are usually taken in the morning.

Do not stop taking corticosteroids suddenly without your doctor's permission. If stopping your steroids after taking them for a long period of time (more than three weeks) then the dose may need to be gradually reduced under the supervision of a doctor.

If you miss a dose

Take your dose as soon as possible except when it is close to the time for your next dose. If it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your regular dosing schedule. You should not take two doses at the same time.

If you are taking the medicine on alternate days, take the missed dose that same morning if you remember. If you remember in the afternoon that a dose is missed, skip the missed dose and take it the following morning, then go back to your regular schedule.

Side Effects

Unfortunately as well as having good effects, most medicines have some effects on your body that are unwanted. These are called *side effects*.

A short course of steroids usually causes no side effects. Side effects are more likely to occur if you take steroids for a long period of time, or take a number of short courses repeatedly. The higher the dose of corticosteroids you are taking, the greater the chance you will develop side effects.

This list of side effects is **not** complete. Tell your doctor or pharmacist if any of these side effects are of a concern to you.

Call your doctor **immediately** if you have any of these side effects:

- stomach pain or blood in vomit/stool
- muscle cramps or weakness
- fluid retention e.g. swollen legs
- change in your vision
- increased thirst or urination (peeing)
- skin rash

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you have these side effects:

- gastrointestinal upset, nausea and indigestion
- thrush and other infections
- increased appetite and weight gain
- mood changes and insomnia (sleeplessness)
- changes in blood sugar e.g. especially if you are a diabetic
- skin problems such as poor healing

Long-term use of steroids is associated with osteoporosis (loss of bone mass), Cushing's syndrome (symptoms may include moon face, increased fat tissue of the neck and trunk) and an increased risk of cataracts. In children these medications could suppress growth. Discuss with your doctor if you are concerned with long-term steroid therapy.

Other Medicines

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking any other medicine including herbal or complementary products and medicines you can buy without a prescription.

- Do not take anti-inflammatory painkillers (e.g. ibuprofen, diclofenac) unless directed to by your doctor
- If you take insulin or other medication for diabetes your doctor may need to alter the dose if you are on steroids for more than a few weeks
- Check with your doctor if you are taking anti-epileptic medication (e.g. carbamazepine) or rifampicin (these medications can reduce the effectiveness of steroids)

While you are taking corticosteroids

Most people who are on steroids for a long time carry a 'steroid card' or have a MedicAlert bracelet or similar in case of emergencies. If you see another doctor, tell him/her that you are taking steroids. The dose of steroid may need to be increased if you are ill or going to have surgery.

You may be more at risk of catching infections when you are on steroids. Avoid being around people with viral infections such as chicken pox or measles. Seek medical advice before getting any immunisations while taking steroids.

Storage

Keep all medicines out of the reach of children.

Read this leaflet and discuss any questions you have about your medicines with your doctor or pharmacist.