

Short-term Steroid treatment

Steroids are hormones produced naturally in the body by the adrenal glands and reproductive organs. They have many different functions.

Steroid medications such as Prednisolone and Dexamethasone are called corticosteroids and are used as anti-inflammatory agents. They are different to the anabolic steroids used by athletes to improve their performance.

Corticosteroids are very useful medicines for a large number of conditions and generally cause few side-effects when used for short periods of time (less than two weeks). If side-effects are experienced they stop when the medication course is finished.

Common side effects of short-term steroid treatment:

Behavioural changes: Carers may notice irritability or mood swings whilst their child is taking steroid medication. Reverting to younger behaviour eg. Temper tantrums, may also occur. Usually the effect is temporary but if you have concerns please speak to your doctor or nurse.

Sleep Disturbance: some children will have trouble sleeping whilst they are taking steroid medication. Ensuring that they have a good bedtime routine, with no use of electronic devices for 1 hour before they go to bed, may help.

Weight Gain; Steroid therapy may stimulate your child's appetite. This means that they will feel hungrier than usual and therefore may eat more than usual, leading to weight gain.

- Keeping to a well-balanced diet, encouraging a good intake of fruit and vegetables, is important.

Another cause of weight gain is fluid retention, which will get better once the medication is ceased.

Irritation of the stomach lining: it is best to give this type of medication with a meal or after food to avoid irritation of the stomach lining. See a doctor if severe or ongoing stomach pain occurs.

Less Common Side Effects from short-term steroid treatment:

Usually these effects only occur after long-term steroid treatment or very high doses

- Weight gain with stretch marks and a chubby "moonface"
- High Blood Pressure- if your child is experiencing headaches or dizziness have your doctor check this
- Alterations in Blood Sugar- symptoms of high blood sugar include excessive thirst and needing to pass urine more often than usual
- Effect on growth and thinning of bones- this is closely monitored when children are on steroids for a prolonged time

General Instructions for Short-term Steroid treatments

- Keep the medicine in a safe place where your child cannot reach it
- Give the medicine at the same time each day (usually in the morning) with a meal or after food
- If you forget to give your child their dose do not give them a double dose.
- If your child vomits after taking their dose inform their doctor or nurse, as your child may need to take another one.

Important things to note while your child is taking steroids

Steroids affect the immune system which means that your child may be at increased risk of infection while they are taking them

- Do not have your child vaccinated with a "live vaccine" such as the MMR vaccine while they are taking steroids. If you are unsure check with your doctor or immunisation provider.
- If your child develops a **fever** or becomes unwell see a doctor promptly
- **Chicken Pox**, if your child has not had chicken Pox and is in contact with a child who has Chicken Pox or develops Chicken Pox within 48 hours, you must come to hospital immediately. Chicken pox is more severe in children taking steroids. Your child's immunity to Chicken pox can be checked with a blood test, and an injection to protect him or her can be given if necessary.

For more information

Paediatric Emergency Department
Women's and Children's Hospital
72 King William Road
North Adelaide SA 5006
Tel 08 8161 7044
Fax 08 8161 6750
<http://www.wch.sa.gov.au>
Dr J Schutz June 2016

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