

PREVENTER MEDICATION: ORAL CORTICOSTEROIDS

Oral corticosteroids come in tablets or liquid.

Examples: prednisone (eg.Deltasone) methylprednisolone (eg.Medrol)
 prednisolone (eg.Pediapred) dexamethasone (eg.Decadron)

How do they work?

Your body produces natural corticosteroids from the adrenal glands situated above the kidneys. Oral corticosteroids decrease inflammation, swelling and mucous in the airways. They also make the airways less "twitchy" or irritable.

When are they used?

Oral corticosteroids are the strongest and most effective asthma medication. They are used when your asthma becomes severe, when your airways are very inflamed, tight and filled with mucous. Oral corticosteroids are the **last** medication to be added in your action plan and the **first** one to be removed once your symptoms are better. Oral corticosteroids start to work within a few hours, but may take several days before they improve your condition.

Oral corticosteroids are prescribed in several ways:

1. **Pulse or Burst:** Is a short 3-7 day course of steroids designed to decrease the swelling in the airways quickly. If your symptoms don't improve or if they become worse while you are on oral steroids, call your doctor.
2. **Alternate Morning Dose:** If you require frequent bursts of steroids, then you may be placed on a schedule of alternate morning dosing. This is usually for people with moderate or severe asthma.
3. **Daily Dose:** If alternate morning doses do not keep your asthma under control, then daily doses must be taken. This is usually for people with severe asthma. There will be more side effects associated with daily use.

Keep taking your regular asthma medications unless otherwise indicated by your doctor.

What are the possible side effects?

If oral corticosteroids are taken for only a few days side effects are minimal but may include an increase in appetite, mood swings, stomach upset, water retention, difficulty sleeping and increase in blood sugar.

Side effects with longer term use depend on the dose, how often the corticosteroids are taken (every day or every second day) and for how long. The side effects vary from person to person. They may include:

- weight gain from increased appetite and retention of water
- a swollen look or moon face
- stomach upset and ulcers
- mood swings
- excess hair growth
- slow growth in children
- elevation of blood sugar
- acne

They may also promote:

- infections
- osteoporosis (which makes bones more likely to break)
- thinning and bruising of the skin
- increased blood pressure
- cataracts
- psychological changes

Taking the steroids in the morning with breakfast minimizes side effects. This coincides with your body's own production of steroids and it will avoid irritation of your stomach.

Always take it after eating food or drinking milk. If you experience any side effects contact your doctor.

Taking corticosteroids daily for extended periods of time reduces the production of your body's own steroids that are needed to respond to physical stress such as major injury or surgery. It is **crucial** that you **carry a Medic Alert Card or wear a bracelet** stating you take corticosteroids regularly. This will alert the doctor in an emergency. Always notify your doctor or dentist of your steroid use before having any procedures.

NEVER stop taking your corticosteroids without talking to your doctor. Long-term steroids need to be **tapered off slowly** to prevent withdrawal symptoms such as muscle and joint aches, fatigue, weakness, dizziness, nausea, fever and drop in blood pressure.