

# Steroids and High Blood Sugar

## For patients who are taking steroids as part of their treatment

Read this pamphlet to learn more about:

- How taking steroids can cause high blood sugar
- Common side effects to watch for
- How to manage blood sugar when taking steroids
- Where to find more information



Your blood sugar is high (also called hyperglycemia) because you are taking steroids. Steroids are a medicine that can cause high blood sugar in people **who have diabetes or have never had diabetes.**

People who have diabetes and are taking steroids may need to increase their diabetes medicine or start new diabetes medicine.

People who do not have diabetes may need to start taking diabetes medicine.

## **How do steroids cause high blood sugar?**

Your body needs sugar for energy. Insulin is a hormone that controls your blood sugar by moving sugar from the blood into the body's cells. When you take steroids, your cells have to work harder to use blood sugar and your body may not make enough insulin.

Common names for steroids:

- prednisolone (prednisone)
- dexamethasone (Decadron)
- methylprednisolone (Solu-Medrol)
- cortisone
- hydrocortisone

## **What are common side effects of taking steroids?**

- Hunger
- Indigestion
- Weight gain
- Swelling or puffiness around the face
- Higher chance of getting infections such as urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Sleep problems
- Mood swings

If you have any of these symptoms tell the health care provider who prescribed your steroid medicine as soon as possible.

## **How do I take my steroid medicine?**

When you start your steroid medicine, you may need to start taking a high amount (dose) and slowly take less over time or stop altogether.

**Never stop taking your steroid medicine all at once without help from your health care provider.**

## **Why is it important to lower high blood sugar?**

Having high blood sugar raises your chances of:

- Infections (such as urinary tract infections, thrush)
- Emergencies such as Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA) in people who have type 1 diabetes and very serious dehydration in people who have type 2 diabetes
- Long-term damage to your organs

## **How do I know if I have high blood sugar?**

If you have high blood sugar, you may:

- Feel tired or sick
- Be thirsty (you may be drinking a lot)
- Need to urinate (pee) a lot
- Have dry mouth and skin
- Have blurry vision

**If you have any of these symptoms, call your health care team as soon as possible.** You must check your blood sugar to know if you have high blood sugar.

## How do I manage my blood sugar while taking steroids?

- ✓ **Always tell your health care team prescribing the steroids if you have diabetes.**
- ✓ **Check your blood sugar regularly.**
  - Check at least before breakfast, before supper, and more often when you are not feeling well. You can get a glucose meter to check your blood sugar from your pharmacy or health care team.
  - Testing regularly lets you see patterns of your blood sugar levels. This information will help in adjusting your medicine.

If your blood sugar is more than \_\_\_\_\_, call your health care team

- ✓ **Stay active.**
  - Activity (moving your muscles) lowers your blood sugar levels. Activity can also help you to lose weight, improve your blood flow, and lower your stress levels.
- ✓ **Talk to a dietitian.**
  - Ask to talk to a dietitian about healthy eating and what foods will raise your blood sugar.
- ✓ **Take your medicine.**
  - Take your diabetes medicine as directed to control your blood sugar.
  - You can ask for a referral to a diabetes team to help you.

### Important:



If how much steroid medicine you're taking changes, your diabetes medicine or insulin may also change. Call your health care team for help.

## For more information

### [American Diabetes Association](#)

- Type “steroids” into the search bar

Or see other fact sheets online about steroids and diabetes:

- <http://www.cancer.med.umich.edu/files/steroid-induced-diabetes/pdf>  
(from the University of Michigan Cancer Center)
- <https://static.diabetesaustralia.com.au/s/fileassets/diabetes-australia/796070b1-8781-4f16-9dcb-ca113ef3b633.pdf>  
(from the National Diabetes Services Scheme)

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