



Staying safe whilst on steroid medication and after you stop it

Information for patients who are taking steroid medication
(by mouth, joint/muscle injection, inhaled, topical
[skin, genital or rectal])

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You have been given this leaflet because your health care professional thinks you are at risk of developing adrenal insufficiency or developing an adrenal crisis if you are unwell (have a procedure such as surgery, or go into labour) and not given appropriate steroid cover.

What are steroid medications and what are they used for?

- Corticosteroids, often known as steroids, are an anti-inflammatory medicine prescribed in a wide range of conditions
- They are a man-made version of hormones normally produced by the adrenal glands (which sit on top of the kidneys) called cortisol
- Corticosteroids are available in different forms, including: tablets; injections; inhalers; nasal sprays, lotions, gels or creams

What are the possible side effects of steroid treatment?

- If you have been prescribed steroid medication in any form:
 - ⇒ for four weeks or more
 - ⇒ had three courses or more in 12 months
 - ⇒ dexamethasone for more than 10 daysIt is possible that your adrenal glands could have temporarily stopped producing your own natural steroid hormone called cortisol. This leads to a condition called adrenal insufficiency. If not recognised or treated promptly, it can be potentially dangerous

Your risk increases:

- ⇒ if you are on oral steroids for four weeks or longer
- ⇒ if you are receiving intra-articular or intramuscular steroid injections and also use steroids in another form (eg inhaled or oral steroids etc)
- ⇒ if you use steroids in any form and take certain drugs (some antivirals, some antifungals and an antibiotic called clarithromycin if used long term)
- ⇒ take high dose inhaled steroids and repeated courses of oral steroids (three or more course in past six months)

- This risk of adrenal insufficiency also continues for 12 months after you stop regular steroid medication or the last course of steroid medication

What is adrenal insufficiency?

- Cortisol is the body's natural steroid hormone. Cortisol is an important hormone that plays many vital roles in maintaining and regulating normal healthy body functions, particularly during stress. It is a hormone essential for survival
- Adrenal insufficiency is a condition where the adrenal glands do not produce adequate amounts of the hormone, cortisol
- If you have adrenal insufficiency and do not get any or adequate amounts of steroid medication particularly during episodes of illness, procedures or surgery, you can potentially become dangerously ill
- Symptoms of adrenal insufficiency include:
 - ⇒ feeling more tired
 - ⇒ feeling dizzy
 - ⇒ feeling sick

What can you do to keep yourself safe whilst on and after you stop steroid medication?

There are five things to remember!

1. Carry a Steroid Emergency Card at all times. This card tells other people that you are or were on steroid medication. You can request an Steroid Emergency Card from your hospital team or by downloading one from the following website: **<https://www.endocrinology.org/media/3563/new-nhs-emergency-steroid-card.pdf>**
2. Take your steroid medication regularly as prescribed, and not to stop unless advised to do so by your doctor or specialist nurse
3. If you are advised to stop your steroid medication, your doctor or specialist nurse will ask you to inform them if you feel more tired, dizzy or sick off steroid medication. These symptoms may mean you have adrenal insufficiency and they will ask you to restart your steroid medication while planning additional checks

4. If you are or were on steroid medication and you become unwell or need to have a procedure or surgery, you will need to follow the 'Sick Day Rules'
5. The risk of adrenal insufficiency from steroid medication last for up to 12 months after your last dose or course

What are 'Sick Day Rules'?

- If you become ill, your body would naturally increase the production of cortisol, from your adrenal glands. If you have adrenal insufficiency, you will not be able to produce the additional cortisol that your body needs
- Therefore, if you are taking oral steroid medication, it is essential to mimic the body's natural response by increasing the dose of your steroid medication appropriately
- 'Sick day rules' give you guidance on how you should be adjusting your oral steroid medication tablets if you become unwell (for example, if you have an infection that is bad enough to make you change your plans, stay in bed to rest or even consider coming to hospital)
- The table below gives you simple advice on when and how to increase your dose of tablet steroid medication
- Remember that taking a higher dose of steroids for a short period of time whilst you are unwell is necessary and is not harmful. You **do not need** to change the doses of any other hormone or other tablets you take regularly

Travelling away from home

- It is advisable that you take an extra supply of oral steroid medication with you, in case you need to increase your dose due to illness

Other important advice

- For those on steroids long term (year or longer) you can purchase a medical alert bracelet or necklace by visiting (online) or phoning one of the following retailers:

https://www.universalmedicalid.co.uk/cat_uk/medical-ID-bracelets-62?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI1uPftuTF7AIVFODtCh2iKA75EAAYASAAEgIrM_D_BwE

<https://www.medicalert.org.uk/products/>

https://www.theidbandco.com/Medical-Bracelets?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI1uPftuTF7AIVFODtCh2iKA75EAAYAiAAEgI6i_D_BwE

Sick Day Rule 1

During period of illness such:

- a.** Illness with fever, or
- b.** Illness requiring complete bed rest; or
- c.** Illness requiring treatment with antibiotics

- ⇒ If you are on prednisolone at a dose of less than 10mg daily, increase your dose to 10mg once a day to be taken on rising. If you are already on prednisolone at a dose of 10mg or higher daily, you don't need to increase your dose any further
- ⇒ If you are on dexamethasone at a dose of less than 1mg daily, increase your dose to 1mg daily to be taken on rising. If you are already on dexamethasone at a dose of 1mg or higher daily, you don't need to increase your dose any further

Continue on the above increased dose for 3–5 days and resume your usual dose thereafter provided that you are well. If you continue to remain unwell after five days, remain on the increased dose and contact your doctor for further advice.

If it is not possible for you to follow 'Sick Day Rule 1' (either because you are on steroid medication which are not tablets [joint/muscle injection, inhaled, skin or genital/rectal] or have stopped your regular steroid medication within the last 12 months), contact your GP for advice if you are feeling particularly tired, dizzy **or** sick during your episode of illness as these symptoms may suggest you need additional oral steroid medication. Show them your Steroid Emergency Card.

Sick Day Rule 2

You may require an injection of hydrocortisone so seek medical help/advice in the event of:

1. Severe illness;
2. Persistent vomiting or diarrhoea;

Also make the doctor, nurse, dentist or midwife aware of your risk of adrenal insufficiency if there is a plan for you to:

3. Fast for a procedure including surgery requiring general anaesthesia;
4. Have a procedure or surgery;
5. Deliver a baby

Contact your key worker or the doctor who is prescribing your steroid medication if you need further advice!



Do you really need to go to A&E?

Check symptoms online quickly and safely.

A **free** service for NHS patients.

uhb.nhs.uk/ask

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