

# Steroid medications and diabetes

Some people with diabetes may need to take steroid medications to help manage other conditions, such as asthma, arthritis and dermatitis.

Steroid medications reduce pain and inflammation, and they can also be used to prevent nausea during medical procedures (such as chemotherapy).

Your body produces steroid hormones (also called corticosteroids) to help it fight stress, injury and disease. Steroid medications have a similar effect to the hormones produced by the body. There are many different types of steroid medications including cortisone, prednisolone, hydrocortisone and prednisone.



Steroid medications can be taken in various ways, including:

- » orally (as tablets or liquid)
- » with an inhaler
- » by injection (into a joint or muscle)
- » as drops for eyes or ears
- » as a cream applied to the skin.

## How do steroid medications affect blood glucose levels?

If you have diabetes and you are taking steroid medication, you may find that your blood glucose levels increase. Steroid medications can raise blood glucose levels by reducing the action of insulin (causing insulin resistance) and making the liver release stored glucose into the bloodstream.

The timeframe in which these medications may affect your blood glucose levels can vary depending on how you are taking them:

- » **Oral steroids:** Blood glucose levels may begin to rise within a few days of starting the medication. The effect on blood glucose levels will depend on the time, dose and type of steroid you are taking.
- » **Steroid injections:** Blood glucose levels may rise soon after the injection and may remain high for three to 10 days afterwards.

Creams used for skin conditions, and inhaled steroids used for asthma, are unlikely to affect blood glucose levels.

If you need to take steroid medication, talk to your doctor about how it may affect your blood glucose levels and ask for advice on how to manage this. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for an information sheet about this medication.

High blood glucose levels can make you feel unwell, tired/lacking in energy, and thirsty, and make you pass urine more often.

Ask for your doctor's or diabetes educator's advice about monitoring your blood glucose levels while taking steroid medication.

If you are taking steroid medication, talk to your doctor about how this may affect your blood glucose levels.



### What you need to know when starting steroid therapy

- Remind your doctor that you have diabetes. Your doctor may adjust your dose of steroid medication to minimise the risk of side effects.
- Make sure you understand how to take oral steroid medication safely.
- As steroid medications can cause blood glucose levels to increase, talk to your doctor or diabetes educator about monitoring your levels more closely. Ask them for advice about managing your diabetes if your blood glucose levels are above the target range.
- Ask your doctor or diabetes educator whether your dose of diabetes medication or insulin needs to be adjusted regularly while you are on steroid medication.
- Continue to follow a healthy eating plan and do regular physical activity.
- If you are on long-term steroid treatment, wear some identification such as a Medic Alert bracelet.
- If you have been taking oral steroid medication for a long time, it's important NOT to stop suddenly. Your doctor will provide you with instructions on how to stop your medication slowly.

### The NDSS and you

The NDSS provides a range of services to help you manage your diabetes. These include our Infoline and website for advice on diabetes management, NDSS products and a range of support programs to help you learn more about managing your diabetes.

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