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## Steroid Tablets (Cortisone)

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### Other names for this medication:

- Dexamethasone – Decadron®
- Hydrocortisone – Cortef®
- Methylprednisolone – Medrol®
- Prednisone

### How does this medication work?

In asthma, the bronchial tubes are inflamed, swollen and produce mucous. Steroids reduce the inflammation, swelling and mucous and allow other medications such as bronchodilators to have a better effect. Steroid tablets begin to work within a few hours but may take a few days to clear the asthma symptoms.

Steroid tablets are generally used in short courses to regain control of asthma but in some people may be needed long term to maintain control. Steroid tablets are used when other medications such as steroid inhalers fail to control the symptoms of asthma.

### When used for a short time:

- Steroid tablets may be needed for a few days or weeks when asthma is uncontrolled.
- Steroid tablets must be taken as prescribed by your doctor. It is usual to start with a high dose and remain on this dose until symptoms have cleared. The dose is then reduced.
- Never stop taking steroid tablets suddenly unless your doctor has advised it.

### **When used for a short time (continued):**

- It is best to take this medication with food or milk to avoid upset stomach.
- If you take this medication only one time a day, take it in the morning with breakfast.
- Continue to take your regular asthma medications, including your steroid inhaler, while taking steroid tablets.
- If your symptoms become worse when taking steroid tablets or have not cleared after 5 days, call your doctor for advice.

### **When used for many months or years:**

- Some people need to take steroid tablets every day or every second day for long periods of time to keep their asthma controlled.
- If continuing treatment with steroid tablets is required for months or years, side effects can be reduced by using the smallest dose needed to control symptoms and sometimes by using them on alternate days.

### **Side effects:**

When steroid tablets are taken for a few days or up to a couple of weeks, there are usually no side effects.

When steroid tablets are used for many months or years, you may notice:

- a feeling of well-being
- a feeling of agitation or depression
- trouble sleeping
- acne
- increased appetite and weight gain
- water gain making hands, feet or face puffy
- increased blood pressure
- stomach upset or heartburn
- increased blood sugar
- bruising or thinning of the skin
- slower growth rate in children

Other treatments may be added to reduce some of these effects.

## **Contact your doctor if you notice**

- blurred vision
- cataracts forming
- black tarry stools
- painful or burning feeling in your stomach
- pain in any joint

## **Remember**

- If you are ill and vomit within 3 hours of taking a steroid tablet, repeat the dose.
- When using steroid tablets, do not use Aspirin, medications containing Aspirin (ASA) or Aspirin-like medications without talking to your doctor. These may irritate your stomach.
- If you have taken steroid tablets within the past 2 years you may need to take them again during a serious illness, operation or accident. Be sure that any doctor or dentist treating you for any condition knows you have taken steroid tablets.
- Steroid tablets may increase your appetite. Watch what you eat to avoid gaining weight and follow an exercise plan. Your health care provider can help you.
- Steroid tablets can cause you to hold extra water. This can increase blood pressure. Talk to your health care provider about limiting the amount of salt you have.
- If you take steroid tablets for a long time, talk to your health care provider about checking for bone loss called osteoporosis. Osteoporosis can be prevented and treated.
- Check with your doctor or health care provider before having any vaccinations or flu shots.