

# STEROIDS TAKEN INTERNALLY

## **What are steroids?**

Steroids are a group of hormones made naturally by the human body and are essential for life. Cortisone is an example of a steroid. Cortisone and compounds related to it (called corticosteroids) or just “steroids” are widely used in medicine. They control allergies, inflammation, and many disease processes. Steroid compounds can be applied to the skin in the form of creams or they can be taken internally. We are describing the use of steroids taken internally, either by mouth or by injection. The usual steroid given in pill form is Prednisone while the usual steroid given by injection is Kenalog.

## **Safety:**

Steroids have effects on the entire body; those that are not desired are called “side effects”.

Steroids are remarkably safe for most people when used for brief periods of a few weeks or less. Most people taking steroids for short periods have no unpleasant side effects. However, disturbances of sleep patterns and increased appetite are common. Others will notice weight gain resulting from fluid retention. Changes in mood (usually nervousness or restlessness) may occur. Sometimes there is indigestion. These side effects are usually minor, and disappear after your physician stops the steroid. If you’re having troublesome side effects, please contact your doctor.

## **Treatment:**

The most common internal steroid treatment is Prednisone taken by mouth. This medicine acts rapidly and is inexpensive. Most patients are told to take the entire day’s dose of Prednisone in the morning, because this coincides with the body’s own rhythm of steroid production.

The amount of Prednisone prescribed for you depends on the severity of your skin problem. The starting dose is an estimate. It may have to be increased or decreased, depending on your response to it. As your skin improves, the dose of Prednisone will be gradually decreased.

Do not stop the medication abruptly. It should be done gradually in the manner advised by your physician. To do otherwise can be dangerous.

If your skin doesn’t improve promptly, or if you are having trouble with the side effects, please call the office.

If you see another doctor for any reason, be sure he or she knows you are taking Prednisone. A medication card in your wallet stating you are using this medicine (and what dose you are using) is also advisable. This is important if you are in an accident or require surgery.

## **CAUTION:**

Internal steroids may worsen diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, or ulcers of the stomach or duodenum. Please inform your doctor if you have ever had any of these problems.

Other occasional side effects include muscle weakness, broken bones, cataracts, acne, stretch marks, purple spots on the skin increases hair, and increased fat in the face and trunk.

One of the most serious side effects is an increased susceptibility to infection. Report to your doctor if you experience persistent fever, cough, diarrhea, or other unusual illness.

Serious side effects are much more common when steroids are used for months or years. Consequently, we use long-term steroid treatment only when a disease threatens or seriously disturbs a patient’s life.