

Steroid Side Effects: How to Reduce Corticosteroid Side Effects

How to Reduce Drug Side Effects



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Corticosteroids, often called just steroids, are anti-inflammatory drugs. Most are synthetic forms of cortisone, a hormone naturally made in your adrenal glands. These include: prednisone (sold under many brand names, such as Deltasone and Sterapred), methylprednisolone (Medrol), prednisolone (Prelone, PEDIAPRED), dexamethasone (Decadron, Hexadrol), and hydrocortisone (Acticort, Cortef).

Note: This article and the information below do not refer to "androgenic" or "anabolic" steroids, which are properly used only to treat a deficiency of sex hormones in men, but are often abused for muscle-building. They share some chemical similarities but act quite differently - and are not used in treating inflammation.

Corticosteroids come in many forms; these medications can be taken orally or injected (into a joint, into a muscle, or via intravenous infusion) - all of which may be used in inflammatory arthritis. They may also be applied to the skin as a cream or ointment, used for rashes including those of lupus, or inhaled, as is done for asthma and nasal allergy.

Understanding Corticosteroid Side Effects

Steroids are often extremely effective in relieving the pain and other symptoms of inflammatory arthritis and other forms of rheumatic disease. In some cases, they may be life-saving.

However, like all drugs, corticosteroids can have negative side effects. The degree to which they occur is usually dose-dependent: the higher the daily dose and the longer the period of time you take the drug, the greater your risk of side effects. ***If your dose is low, your risk of serious side effects is quite small, especially if you take the precautions below and any others your physician recommends.*** Sometimes your physician will arrange for you to take steroids on alternate days, which can decrease side effects.

Reading about these side effects may make you uncomfortable about taking steroids. While you should be fully aware of the risks before starting these medications, please be reassured that many people take steroids with minor or no side-effects. If any of the suggestions here is unclear, or seems irrelevant to you, please discuss it with your physician.

With long-term use, corticosteroids can result in the following side effects. But taking care of yourself as