

Steroid Medications and Diabetes

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

What are steroids?

Steroid medications reduce pain and inflammation.

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 sugar levels?

If you have diabetes and are taking steroid medication, you may find that your blood sugar levels increase.

Steroid medications can raise blood sugar levels by reducing the action of insulin and making the liver release stored glucose into the bloodstream.

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

- Oral steroids: Blood sugar levels may begin to rise within a few days of starting the medication. The effect on blood sugar levels will depend on the time, dose and the type of steroid you are taking.
- Steroid injections: Blood sugar levels may rise soon after the injection and may remain high for 3-10 days afterwards.
- Creams used for skin conditions and inhaled steroids used for asthma are unlikely to affect blood sugar 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 minimize the risk of side effects.
- Make sure you understand how to take oral steroid medication safely.
- As steroid medications can cause blood sugar levels to increase, talk to your doctor about monitoring your levels more closely. Ask them for advice about managing your diabetes if your blood sugar levels are above the target range.
- Ask your doctor whether your dose of diabetes medication or insulin needs to be adjusted regularly while on steroid medication.
- Continue to follow a healthy eating plan and do regular physical activity.
- If you have been taking oral steroid treatment for a long time, it is important NOT to stop suddenly. Your doctor will provide you with instructions on how to stop your medication slowly.

If you need to take a steroid medication, talk to your doctor about how it may affect your blood glucose levels and ask for advice on how to manage this.