



PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Asthma Medication Review Corticosteroids

How They Are Prescribed:

Corticosteroids come in two forms:

- A metered-dose inhaler
- Liquids or tablets to be swallowed (called oral corticosteroids)

Inhaled corticosteroids are taken with a metered-dose inhaler. When taken at the proper doses, they are safe medications that work well for patients with moderate or severe, persistent asthma. They reduce the sensitivity of the airways to triggers, prevent swelling of the airways, and allow inhaled bronchodilators to work better. Liquid and tablet (oral) corticosteroids are used in serious asthma episodes to quickly reduce swelling of the airways and prevent the episodes from getting even more severe. For people with moderate asthma, oral corticosteroids are sometimes used for 3 to 7 days and then stopped. People with very severe asthma may need to take oral corticosteroids every other day or even daily.

Side Effects:

Inhaled corticosteroids may cause a yeast infection in the mouth or bother the upper airways and cause coughing. There are two things to do to keep these things from taking place. Use a spacer device (an attachment on the inhaler) and rinse out your mouth after you take the medicine. Using oral corticosteroids for a short time may cause different side effects. You may have a better appetite, fluid retention, weight gain, elevated blood sugar, rounding of the face, changes in mood, and high blood pressure. These side effects will stop when you quit taking the medication, but do not stop taking it without first talking to your physician. Oral corticosteroids used for a long time may have bad side effects such as high blood pressure, thinning of the bones, cataracts, muscle weakness, and slower growth in children. Because of these side effects, your physician may prescribe long-term use of oral corticosteroids only if your asthma is severe. Certain infections (such as chickenpox, measles, tuberculosis) may worsen if oral steroids are taken. Check with your physician before starting to take oral steroids if you think you may have an infection.

Action

Corticosteroids are anti-inflammatory medications that prevent and reduce swelling inside the airways and decrease the amount of mucus in the lungs.

Medications

- MDI
 - ✓ Flovent
 - ✓ Vanceril, Azmacort,
 - ✓ Aerovent
- Tablets/Liquid
 - ✓ Prednisone
 - ✓ Prednisilone (Prelone, PediaPred)

Notes:

Corticosteroids are not the same as the steroids used by some athletes. Inhaled corticosteroids and oral corticosteroids taken for a short time do not damage the liver and they do not cause other long-lasting changes in the body. Children as young as 3 years of age, can use inhaled corticosteroids if a holding chamber or spacer device is attached to the metered-dose inhaler. Ask your physician about this. When oral corticosteroids are used to treat serious asthma episodes, they take about 3 hours to start working and are most effective in 6 to 12 hours. Talk to your physician about what to do when you forget to take your medication on time. Discuss the possible effects of high-dose steroids on the growth and bones of your child. If you need surgery and you are taking or have recently taken oral steroids or have been taking high-dose inhaled steroids, tell the surgeon and anesthesiologist before the surgery.

Adapted from: AMA Physician Select Reference Library for Asthma
NIH Asthma Education Clinicians Guide

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