

STEROID TREATMENT

What do steroids do?

If you're hearing steroids, you might be thinking 'roid rage' and misuse by professional athletes. These are one form of steroids but we're talking about corticosteroids – the ones you produce naturally in your body. They are hormones made by the adrenal glands which are above your kidneys. Steroids are actually really useful – they control different things in our bodies, such as how we fight diseases and the way we breakdown food. Taking steroids is a common way to fight cancer but it can affect the way you look and feel.

You might need steroids to:

- Reduce swelling around the cancer, such as a brain tumour
- Treat your cancer (often with chemotherapy)
- Prevent infections after a transplant
- Ease sickness when you have chemotherapy
- Increase your appetite.

How do I take steroids?

There are different ways to take them, depending on the type your doctor prescribes. You can either:

- Swallow a tablet
- Take a syrup or tablet that dissolves
- Have an injection into a vein, muscle (usually your leg or buttock muscle) or the fat under your skin.

Most people only need to take steroids for a few days or weeks.

Carry a steroid card

When you're out and about, carry a steroid card with you. If you need any kind of medical treatment, the small card will let health professionals know what medication you're taking.

How will steroids make me feel?

The effects from your steroids for treatment aren't as extreme as the performance-enhancing kind. Some people have side effects, others don't. It depends on the dose you take, how long you take them for and whether you're on any other medication. Common side effects can include:

- Feeling more hungry than normal and putting on weight
- Swollen hands, feet or ankles

- Increased risk of infection
- Changes in your blood sugar levels
- Changes in your mood and behaviour
- Difficulty sleeping.

If you experience any of these, the team looking after you can help you to feel better. For example, putting on weight can affect your confidence and a dietitian could offer advice. It's important you don't stop taking them or mess around with your dose – always go back to your doctor first.

Sometimes, steroid treatment stops you producing your own natural hormones. If this happens, you might be given low doses of replacement steroids to stop you feeling unwell.

It might not be the first thing on your mind when you're having cancer treatment, but if you're concerned about you or your partner getting pregnant, talk to your doctor. This is because steroid treatment can harm a developing baby. So it's not a good idea to get pregnant when you're on steroid treatment and is best to use contraception if you're having sex.

Stopping steroid treatment

Your body will need time to adjust after you've had steroid treatment, especially if you've been on a long course, or had high doses. When you've finished treatment, your doctor will reduce the dose of steroids that you take gradually to make sure your body can cope. Stopping treatment suddenly will make you feel unwell.

Who are we?

CLIC Sargent is a charity dedicated to supporting young people like you. We help people with cancer aged 24 and under from diagnosis onwards. To find out more about how we can help you and your family, or for more information about living with cancer, visit clicsargent.org.uk