

**FACT SHEET:**

Steroid medications and diabetes

Some people with diabetes may need to take steroid medications to help manage other conditions, such as asthma, arthritis, autoimmune diseases, and dermatitis, or as part of chemotherapy. Steroid medications can increase blood glucose levels.

Your body produces steroid hormones (also called corticosteroids) to fight stress, injury, and disease. Steroid medications have a similar effect to the hormones produced by the body. Steroid medications reduce pain and inflammation. They can also be used to prevent nausea during medical procedures such as chemotherapy.

There are many different types of steroid medications, including cortisone, hydrocortisone, prednisolone, prednisone, and dexamethasone.

Steroid medications can be taken in various ways, including:

- orally as tablets or liquid
- with an inhaler
- by injection into a joint, vein or muscle
- as drops for eyes or ears
- as a cream applied to the skin.

How do steroid medications affect blood glucose levels?

Your blood glucose levels are likely to increase if you have diabetes and take steroid medication. The use of steroids can lead to the diagnosis of diabetes in some people due to the impact on the blood glucose levels.

The timing of taking steroid medication can affect when blood glucose levels start to change.

Oral steroids. Blood glucose levels may begin to rise within 4-8 hours. The effect on blood glucose levels will depend on the time, dose and type of steroid you are taking.

Steroid injections. Blood glucose levels may rise soon after the injection and may remain high for days afterwards. The effect on blood glucose levels will depend on the type of injection and the type of steroid that is injected.

Using steroid found in creams for skin conditions, inhaled for asthma and in ear and eye drops is unlikely to increase blood glucose levels.

Talk to your diabetes health professional about how taking steroid medications may increase your blood glucose levels. Ask for an information sheet about this medication to understand more.

High blood glucose levels can make you feel unwell, tired, or lacking in energy, and thirsty. They can also make you pass urine more often. Ask for advice on how to manage this. Seek advice from your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or diabetes educator on monitoring blood glucose levels while taking steroid medication.

What you need to know when starting steroid medication

- Remind your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner that you have diabetes. They may adjust your dose of steroid medication to minimise the risk of high blood glucose levels.
- Make sure you understand how to take oral steroid medication safely.
- Talk to your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or diabetes educator about monitoring your blood glucose levels more closely. If you do not monitor, ask them to show you how to monitor and access blood glucose monitoring strips through the NDSS.
- Ask your doctor, diabetes nurse practitioner or diabetes educator for advice on managing your diabetes if your blood glucose levels are above the target range.
- Ask your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner how to adjust your diabetes medication and/or insulin when you start taking steroid medication. Also ask them how to adjust your diabetes medication and/or insulin when you are gradually reducing your steroid medication and when to return to take your usual doses of diabetes medication and/or insulin.
- Continue to follow a healthy eating plan and do regular physical activity.
- If you are on long-term steroid treatment, wear some identification such as a Medic Alert bracelet.

- If you have been taking oral steroid medication for a long time, it is important **not** to stop suddenly. Your doctor will provide you with instructions on how to stop your medication gradually.



More information and support

- Go to ndss.com.au to search for the 'Blood glucose monitoring', 'Living with type 2 diabetes – what to do when you are sick' or 'Living with type 1 diabetes – what to do when you are sick' and other fact sheets.
- The NDSS is an initiative of the Australian Government administered by Diabetes Australia. Registration with the NDSS is free and open to everyone who has been diagnosed with diabetes and has a Medicare card. Through the NDSS, you can access subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, including blood glucose strips. To find out more about NDSS registration and how to access subsidised diabetes products, go to ndss.com.au/about-the-ndss/registration/, email info@ndss.com.au or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.
- Call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700** and ask to speak to a diabetes educator.
- To find a diabetes educator, go to the website of the Australian Diabetes Educators Association at adea.com.au.
- For more information, ask your doctor or pharmacists for the steroid medication information sheet, call the National Prescribing Service on the Medicine Line **1300 636 424** or go to nps.org.au/medicine-finder.

