

## Corticosteroid medicines

This leaflet is about medicines called corticosteroids (pronounced 'CORE-tick-o-steer-oids') or sometimes just 'steroids'. These are medicines that act like a naturally occurring hormone called cortisol.

This leaflet explains what corticosteroid medicines are used for and important things to know if you are taking one.

### Cortisol is one of the body's key hormones

Your body produces a hormone called cortisol. Cortisol is involved in many important processes, such as converting the food you eat into energy and helping your body to cope with stresses like illness or injury. Cortisol is made by the adrenal glands, which sit on top of the kidneys.

### Corticosteroids are medicines that act like cortisol

Corticosteroid medicines are designed to act in the body like cortisol. There are a number of different corticosteroid medicines. They are used for many different medical conditions and may come as tablets, creams, suppositories, eye drops, in inhalers or as injections. The box below lists corticosteroid medicines that are available as tablets.

#### **Corticosteroid medicines available as tablets**

<b>Medicine name</b>	<b>Brand names</b>
fludrocortisone	Florinef
cortisone	Cortate
dexamethasone	Dexmethsone
hydrocortisone	Hysone
prednisolone	Predsolone, Panafcortelone, Solone
prednisone	Predsone, Panafcort, Sone

### What corticosteroid medicines are used for

Most people who take corticosteroid medicines take them to reduce inflammation in conditions such as arthritis, allergic reactions, asthma, eczema and some gut diseases. Usually this is only for a short time. Many people with asthma use a corticosteroid medicine from an inhaler every day to help prevent asthma attacks.

A different group of people need to take corticosteroid medicines for their whole lives because their bodies cannot make enough cortisol. This is most often because of a condition called Addison's disease. Taking a corticosteroid medicine to replace the body's natural cortisol is called 'replacement therapy'.

## It's important that you know how to take your corticosteroid medicine

Corticosteroid medicines are very effective medicines but like all medicines they can have side effects. It's important to take them correctly to help prevent problems.

If you are using a corticosteroid medicine to replace your body's natural cortisol (replacement therapy), it is important not to stop taking it unless your doctor tells you to. Sometimes you may need to increase the dose of your medicines, for example if you are ill, injured or stressed.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist for a copy of the Consumer Medicines Information leaflet for your medicine and any specific information about your own situation.

If you are taking a corticosteroid medicine, it is important that you know:

- why you are taking it
- how much to take
- how often to take it
- how long to take it for
- whether there are any circumstances when you should change the dose
- what side effects might be expected and how to deal with them.

Whatever the reason you have been prescribed a corticosteroid medicine, it is important that you do not stop taking it or decrease or increase the dose unless you have discussed it with your doctor.

## Where else to find information

Ask your doctor or pharmacist for any specific information about your own situation.

You can call NPS Medicines Line on 1300 888 763 (Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm EST) to speak with a pharmacist about your medicines.

You can find general information about corticosteroid medicines and Addison's disease on the following websites:

- Addison's Disease Association [www.addisons.org.au](http://www.addisons.org.au)
- Better Health Channel [http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/hormones\\_cortisone?opendocument](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/hormones_cortisone?opendocument)
- HealthInsite [http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Addison\\_s\\_Disease](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Addison_s_Disease)