

Stopping your course of steroids

Information for patients

You have received a course of steroids (e.g. prednisolone, dexamethasone) and the course is now complete.

Can I stop my steroid (prednisolone, dexamethasone) tablets?

If you have been taking steroid tablets for less than 12 weeks, you can stop your medication but let your health care provider know if you are having the symptoms listed below.

If you have been taking steroid tablets for more than 12 weeks, please reduce the dose to 3mg prednisolone a day, or take 10mg of hydrocortisone a day for the next 4 weeks. If you are feeling well, you can then stop your steroid tablets.

What symptoms can occur when I stop or reduce my steroid tablets?

In some patients, symptoms may occur after reducing the dose or stopping a course of steroids. These may be due to:

- Recurrence of the condition for which you were prescribed steroids, or
- Symptoms due to producing less of your own steroid hormone.

Symptoms of not producing enough steroid hormone
Feeling more tired, especially in the morning
Feeling lightheaded when you stand up, or fainting
Aching or stiff joints
Low mood
Struggling to finish things/ poor concentration
Feeling weak
Feeling nauseous

If you develop these symptoms after reducing or stopping you steroid tablets, please restart 3mg prednisolone or 10mg hydrocortisone and speak to your healthcare provider as soon as possible.

Is there a problem with my steroid production?

It can be difficult to tell the difference between people who have recurrence of a condition for which steroids have been prescribed from those who are not producing enough steroid hormone. A morning cortisol blood test can assess how much steroid hormone you are producing. Sometimes, further blood tests (a Synacthen test) may be needed to clarify this.

If you are having the symptoms above, please contact your healthcare provider so that they can arrange a morning blood test for you. Do not take the steroid tablets on the day of the blood test until after the blood sample has been taken.

If you are not producing enough steroid hormone, steroid treatment may need to be restarted or continued at a low dose until your own steroid production has improved.

People who are not producing enough steroid hormone are at risk of 'adrenal crisis' if they become unwell with an infection or are having a stressful medical or dental procedure.

What is adrenal crisis?

Adrenal crisis is uncommon but can be serious. If you are not producing enough steroid hormone to help you deal with stress or illness, you may develop low blood pressure, low blood glucose, severe tummy pain, confusion or loss of consciousness. Adrenal crisis needs urgent treatment in hospital.

What should I do to prevent or treat adrenal crisis?

Over the next 6 weeks:

- If you have a **fever** or **require antibiotics** you should take **10mg prednisolone a day/2mg dexamethasone a day/20mg hydrocortisone twice a day** a day until you are feeling better.
- If you have severe vomiting, diarrhoea, fainting, weakness or, pain in your tummy please go to hospital or call 999 and say 'I am having an adrenal crisis'.
- If you are having a medical or dental procedure, please inform your healthcare provider you have had a recent course of steroids.

My healthcare provider	
Their telephone number	
Date of last steroid dose	