

Department of Neurosciences Neuro Oncology Service

Living with a brain tumour:

Taking steroids

This leaflet aims to answer commonly asked questions and explains how steroids are used to help people living with a brain tumour.

What is a steroid?

Steroids occur naturally in the body and are needed to help you function normally. In people living with a brain tumour, steroids are often prescribed for their **anti-inflammatory** effect by reducing the swelling and inflammation sometimes caused by brain tumours.

Why do I need to take steroids?

Swelling (**oedema**) is one of the body's natural responses to disease. If a tumour develops in the brain it is usually surrounded by swelling. There is limited space inside the skull, so too much swelling will lead to increased pressure in the brain, causing symptoms such as headaches, sickness, drowsiness or fits. These symptoms can be severe and a serious threat to your health.

Dexamethasone is the name of the steroid most often prescribed to reduce this swelling.

Are steroids a treatment for brain tumours?

Steroids do not treat the tumour itself but may help to alleviate the symptoms caused by the swelling. Some make significant improvements whilst taking these tablets. Steroids will not stop the tumour from growing. Eventually the effects of the steroids will stop working if the tumour grows too big, so they will not replace any surgical interventions which may be required.

When are steroids prescribed?

Steroids may be prescribed if there is evidence of swelling in the brain caused by a brain tumour. Medical treatments such as surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy can make swelling worse and steroids may be prescribed in anticipation to try to prevent this.

Are there any side effects?

The doses used to help symptoms are much larger than would normally occur in the body. Everyone's body is unique and a person's response to any drug cannot be predicted. Most people will get very few, if any side effects.

You will have regular check-ups with your doctor where the steroid dose and effect will be monitored. Our aim is always to use the lowest dose that keeps your symptoms under control. The most common side effects are listed here:

- Stomach irritation. You will be prescribed an additional tablet to protect your stomach from acid reflux for the duration of the time you take steroids. If you have not been prescribed this, please check with your GP or Key worker.
- Difficulty sleeping
- Increased appetite
- Temporary increase in your blood sugar leading to sugar in your urine and passing a lot of urine (diabetes)
- Mood and behaviour changes
- Increased risk of infections and delayed healing
- Acne
- Increased risk of bruising. Skin may feel thinner than usual
- Flushing and night sweats
- Muscle wasting and weakness if used over a long period of time

When prescribing steroids, the doctor will explain these risks alongside the benefits they will bring. Side effects generally disappear once the dose is reduced or stopped. Sometimes side effects can be improved by taking the steroids earlier in the day. Please contact your doctor or key worker if you are worried about side-effects.

Stopping steroids

Generally the doctor will prescribe the lowest dose that controls your symptoms. Steroids reduce the body's production of its own natural steroids. As a result it can be dangerous to stop steroids suddenly. The dose may need to be cut down gradually, so follow the help and advice of your doctor.

Additional information about taking steroids

- **Always take steroids with or after food.** This helps to reduce the possibility of side effects.
- Get the advice of your doctor or chemist pharmacist if you forget to take a dose or are sick immediately after taking your steroids.
- Always carry the steroid card that is provided by your pharmacist.
- If you need dental treatment, let your dentist know that you are taking steroids.

Remember, it is extremely important to take your steroids exactly as prescribed.

Safety advice

- Always keep steroids in a safe place and out of the reach of children.
- Never let anyone else take your drugs.
- Once the course has finished, any remaining tablets should be returned to a chemist. Do not flush them down the sink or toilet.



We are currently working towards a smoke free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Polish

Jeżeli chciałbyś uzyskać te informacje w innym języku, w dużej czcionce lub w formacie audio, poproś pracownika oddziału o kontakt z biurem Informacji Pacjenta (Patient Information) pod numerem telefonu: 01223 216032 lub pod adresem patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Portuguese

Se precisar desta informação noutra língua, em impressão de letras grandes ou formato áudio, por favor peça ao departamento que contacte a secção de Informação aos Doentes (Patient Information) pelo telefone 01223 216032 ou através do e-mail patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Arabic

إذا كنت تود الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، بالأحرف الكبيرة أو بشكل شريط صوتي، يمكنك أن تطلب من القسم الاتصال بمعلومات المريض على الرقم: 01223216032 أو عبر البريد الإلكتروني: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Cantonese

如您需以另一語言版本、特大字體或錄音形式索取本資料，請要求部門聯絡病人諮詢服務：電話 01223 216032，電郵地址 patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Turkish

Eğer bu bilgileri başka bir dilde veya büyük baskılı veya sesli olarak isterseniz, lütfen bulunduğunuz bölümdeki görevlilere söyleyin Hasta Bilgilendirme servisini arasinlar: 01223 216032 veya patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Urdu

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی دیگر زبان میں، بڑے الفاظ میں یا آڈیو طریقہ سے درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی اس شعبہ سے پیشینٹ انفارمیشن سے ذیل کے ذریعہ رابطہ کرنے کی درخواست کریں: 01223 216032 یا patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Bengali

আপনি যদি এই তথ্য অন্য কোন ভাষায়, বড় অক্ষরে বা অডিও রেকর্ডিং পেতে চান তাহলে 'প্যাশেন্ট ইনফরমেশান' এর সঙ্গে 01223 216032 নম্বরে ফোন করে বা patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk ঠিকানায় ই-মেইল করে যোগাযোগ করার জন্য ডিপার্টমেন্টটিতে অনুরোধ জানান।

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