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Steroids and diabetes

***Information for
patients and carers***

**Diabetes Clinic
David Anderson Building, Foresterhill**

Introduction

We have written this leaflet to explain about some of the effects of taking steroid medicines.

Steroids can cause blood sugar (glucose) levels to rise. People with known diabetes may find it harder to control. Also some people who did not have diabetes before, may develop diabetes after taking steroids (this is called secondary diabetes and it often resolves after the steroids are stopped).

The rise in blood glucose does not happen with inhalation of steroids (steroids that you breathe in), steroid eye drops or with small doses of steroid creams when applied to skin. However, you may notice a moderate or severe rise in your blood glucose if you take steroid tablets or receive a steroid injection into a joint.

What are steroids?

Steroid medications are powerful drugs used to treat many conditions such as asthma, cancer, chronic lung disease, arthritis, many skin condition and some types of blood disorders or eye conditions. Steroids work mainly by reducing inflammation. Types of steroid medications include prednisolone, hydrocortisone and dexamethasone.

Why does blood glucose rise?

Blood glucose levels rise during steroid treatment because your liver produces more glucose than normal and your body is not able to produce enough insulin to cope with this increase. Insulin is a substance produced by the pancreas and regulates blood glucose levels.

Steroids can also cause your body to become resistant to either insulin produced by your own body or insulin you may be injecting to control your diabetes.

What will happen when I take steroids?

Your blood glucose may go up within half a day or so after starting steroid medications. This will happen more commonly in the afternoon and evening if you take your steroids first thing in the morning.

If you take steroids more than once a day then your blood glucose may rise throughout the day.

The bigger the dose of steroids, the more likely that it will affect your blood glucose.

What if I already have diabetes?

Diabetes treated by diet alone

You may need tablets (and very occasionally insulin) to reduce your blood glucose while taking steroids.

Diabetes treated by tablets

You may need to increase your blood glucose lowering tablets or possibly use insulin while taking steroids.

Diabetes treated by insulin

You may need to increase your insulin dose while taking steroids and/or use a different type of insulin.

If steroids are reduced or stopped, your blood glucose may fall and you will probably then need to reduce your tablets or insulin.

What if I haven't been diagnosed with diabetes?

You may need to take tablets or insulin if your glucose levels are high.

What should I do when taking steroids?

If you have diabetes:

- If you are not already testing your own blood glucose levels, we recommend that you should begin testing.
- Discuss this with your Diabetes Team who can provide you with a blood glucose meter and show you how to use it.
- Check your blood glucose levels before each meal and at bedtime (usually 4 times a day).
- If you have Type 1 diabetes, also monitor your blood (or urine) ketones if your blood glucose rises above 14mmol/l. Make sure that you have urine or blood ketone strips at home.

If blood glucose levels rise to more than 15 mmol/l on more than 2 or 3 occasions **and/or** you feel increasingly thirsty, tired or generally unwell, contact your Diabetes Team or GP the same day or first thing the following day to arrange review of your diabetes treatment while taking steroids.

If you did not have diabetes before taking steroids:

If you feel:

- increasingly tired
- thirsty
- develop blurred vision
- go to the toilet to pass water more often

It is possible that your blood glucose could be high.

It is important to see your doctor to have your blood glucose checked.

Useful contact numbers

GP

Diabetes Nurse / Team.....

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**Diabetic Clinic Advice Line
David Anderson Building
Foresterhill Health Campus**

☎ 01224 559977 ☎

Available Monday to Friday 9am to 1pm

NHS 24

☎ 111 ☎

Website:

www.nhsgrampiandiabetes.scot.nhs.uk

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Feedback from the public helped us to develop this leaflet.
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