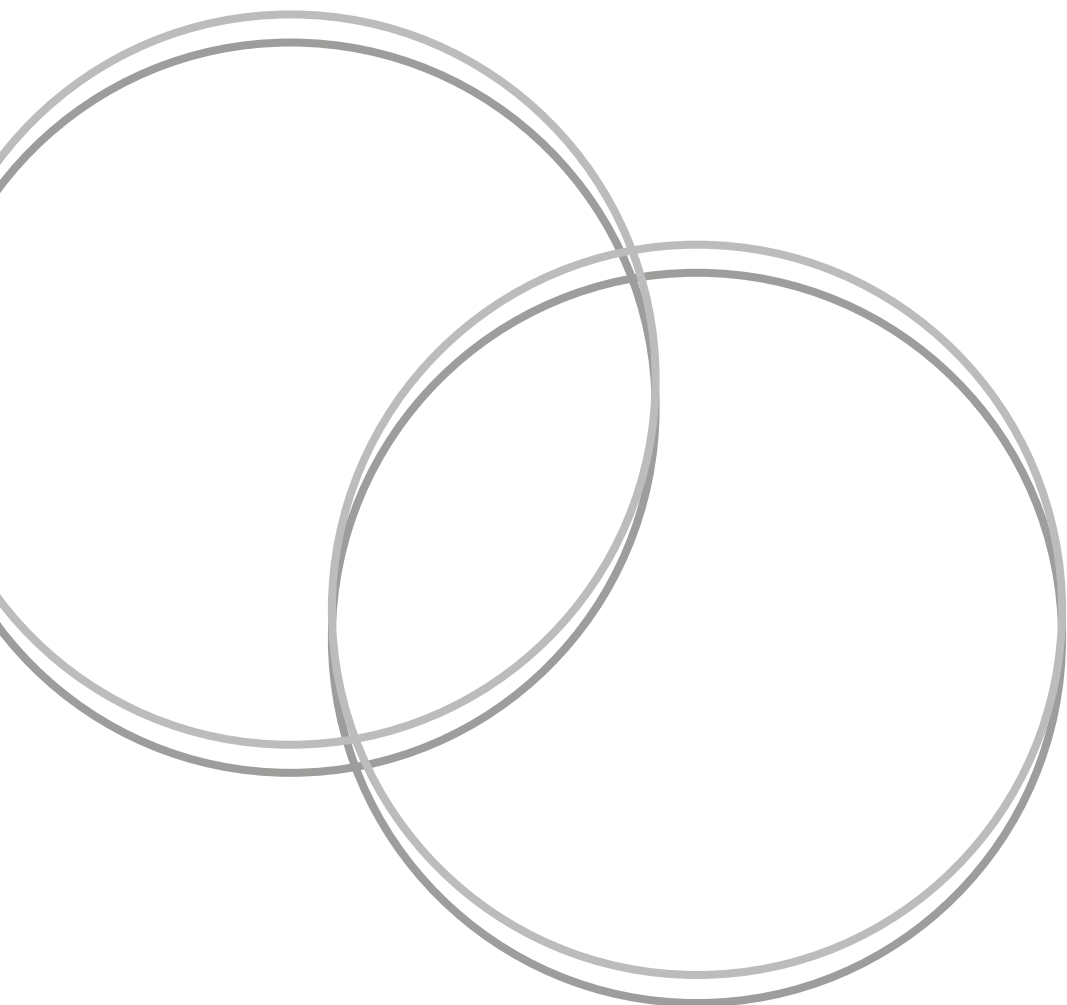




Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Treating kidney diseases with steroids

Information for people who need steroids



This leaflet will provide you with information about steroids. The risks and benefits of steroid treatment are different for each person. Please speak to your kidney doctor about how steroids may affect you. The information in this leaflet is a guide only and does not replace the advice from your healthcare professional.

Many diseases that affect the kidneys are due to inflammation. Steroids reduce inflammation and are used in many conditions, such as asthma and arthritis. Your doctor from the Oxford Kidney Unit has recommended them for your kidney condition.

For some kidney conditions, you may need to take a high dose of steroids for many weeks, months or even years. It is important to remember that your doctor will only recommend steroid treatment if the benefits outweigh the side effects.

What are steroids?

Steroids are naturally occurring chemicals (hormones) in your body. Cortisol is a natural steroid produced by our body that plays a complex role in regulating bodily functions and is essential for life. Sometimes, you need more steroids than your body is producing naturally. Therefore you will need to be given steroid medications. There are several types of steroids, and they all have different effects on the body.

In kidney conditions, you may be prescribed:

1. **Methylprednisolone:** This is given as an injection into a vein.
2. **Prednisolone:** Usually taken in the morning as a tablet, with or after food.
3. **Budesonide:** This is steroid medication (tablet) that targets the part of the intestine where immunoglobulin A is released. This targeted delivery means the drug stays mostly in the intestine and is less absorbed into the bloodstream. Budesonide reduces the production of IgA antibodies in the small intestine to help prevent a build-up in the kidneys. You are less likely to experience side effects seen with long-term steroid use if you take budesonide. You should still carry any steroid cards as these are vital in an emergency.

How will steroids affect me?

Important information about steroids

Taking steroid-containing medications for more than four weeks such as prednisolone tablets, steroid inhalers, and steroid injections, can stop your adrenal glands from making the hormone cortisol. This is known as adrenal insufficiency. Cortisol is known as a 'stress hormone'. It helps your body handle stress, regulate blood pressure and balance salt and fluids. Cortisol is essential for life; when a person is unwell, the adrenals produce more cortisol. When the body is unable to produce cortisol, it is called an adrenal crisis and can be life-threatening. It needs urgent emergency treatment.

What are the symptoms of adrenal crisis?

- low blood pressure
- feeling dizzy or light-headed
- fever, shivering or feeling very cold
- feeling sick and/or vomiting
- feeling very weak, extreme tiredness, drowsiness or confusion
- aching muscles and/or joints
- stomach ache and severe diarrhoea.

If you have missed doses of your steroid or have been unwell and unable to take your medication, please contact 111.

It is essential to take the prescribed dose recommended by a prescriber. Do not stop taking the steroids unless your kidney team has advised you.

When the steroid treatment has been completed, the dose will be gradually reduced.

When you're receiving steroid treatment, we'll provide you with a blue and red card. It's important to keep this card with you at all times. If you ever find yourself in an emergency, healthcare professionals will see the card and know that you're taking steroids, which helps them provide the right care for you.

Side effects

If you take steroids for more than four weeks, you are likely to notice some changes. Steroids can cause side effects, but most people find they can cope with these for the short time they are taking the treatment. The higher the dose, the more likely you are to develop side effects. These side effects are typically short-lived. Below is a list of potential side effects you may experience:

Common side effects (1 in 10 to 1 in 100 people, depending on the dose of steroids)

- An increased risk of infection. If you are taking higher doses of steroids (e.g. 20mg or more of prednisolone), it is important that you avoid contact with anyone who has chicken pox, shingles or measles. If you or anyone in your family or close family friends catches any of these illnesses, you must contact your GP immediately.
- You may experience an increased appetite, which may lead to weight gain. You may also notice a metallic taste in your mouth.
- Heartburn, indigestion, or nausea (feeling sick). If you are on higher doses of steroids (e.g. 10mg or more of prednisolone), you will be given a medication to reduce the level of stomach acid.
- There may be an increase in blood cholesterol levels.
- Skin changes may occur, including a rounder appearance or increased redness on the face. Individuals might experience acne, elevated facial hair growth, or heightened sensitivity to sunlight. These side effects typically resolve after the discontinuation of steroid use.
- You may bruise easily, and your skin will likely become thin and tear if you bump it. Additionally, you may notice that it takes longer for any injuries to heal.

- Muscle weakness, especially the shoulders and thigh muscles. Shakiness or a tremor.
- Changes in your mood (feeling up or down) or a change in your sleep pattern (often difficulty in falling asleep). Taking your tablets in the morning should help with this.
- Fluid retention, ankle swelling and high blood pressure. If this happens, your kidney doctor may need to adjust or start you on some water tablets.
- If you have diabetes, you may find that your blood glucose control is more difficult. Your GP may need to change your medication to improve blood glucose control.

Rare side effects (less than 1 in 100 people, depending on the dose of steroid)

- Diabetes (raised blood glucose level). Your kidney doctor will measure your blood glucose level with each blood test when you come to visit the clinic. Symptoms of raised blood glucose include feeling thirsty. Tell your GP or practice nurse if you develop these symptoms.
- Thinning of your bones (osteoporosis): if you smoke, are elderly, underweight, inactive, have diabetes or lung problems or are a post-menopausal woman, your risk will be higher. You may be given medications to reduce the risk of this if you need to be on steroids for several months.
- Changes in your eyesight, increased pressure in your eyes (glaucoma) and an increased risk of cataracts (if you take steroids for longer than 1 year).
- An increased risk of developing stomach ulcers.
- Weakening of one or both of the hip joints, known as avascular necrosis of the hip. This is very rare. If you develop hip or groin pain, it is essential to let your GP know immediately.

You may find that your menstrual cycle becomes irregular if you are a woman. It is still possible to get pregnant when taking steroids. If you are planning a baby or find you are pregnant whilst taking steroids, seek advice from your GP. **Do not stop taking the steroids.**

What can I do to reduce the side effects?

- If you smoke, give up.
- If you can, get regular exercise. This will help reduce weight gain and is good for muscle and bone strength.
- Use sunscreen with a protective factor of 30 or above.

Your kidney doctor may also prescribe other medication to reduce the side effects.

How will I know if the steroids are helping my kidney condition?

Your kidney doctor will organise and review your blood tests regularly. This will tell us about your kidney function and the level of inflammation in your blood.

What do I do if I become very unwell or have surgery?

- If you become very unwell or start vomiting, seek medical attention immediately by phoning 111. You may require a larger dose of steroids or need to have it by a different route.
- If you need to have any dental work, tell your dentist that you are having steroid treatment.

See the information on the red steroid card for further details if you are unsure what to do.

What else do I need to know?

Do not take anti-inflammatory painkillers (such as ibuprofen) whilst taking steroids (unless advised by your GP), as this can increase the risk of developing a stomach ulcer.

Some other medications should not be taken with steroids, so it is important that you let your GP and other healthcare professionals know that you are taking steroids. This includes medications you can buy from your local pharmacist or chemist (known as over-the-counter) and herbal remedies.

Live vaccinations are not recommended if you are taking moderate or high doses of steroids.

It is safe to drink alcohol when you are taking steroids but within the Department of Health's recommended limits.

Contacts

Renal Day Case Unit

Churchill Hospital

Telephone: **01865 226 106**

8am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday

(Please leave non-urgent messages on the answerphone)

Renal Outpatient

Churchill Hospital

Telephone: **01865 225 355**

8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Renal Pharmacists

Churchill Hospital

Telephone: **01865 226 105**

Email: [**oxfordrenalpharmacists@ouh.nhs.uk**](mailto:oxfordrenalpharmacists@ouh.nhs.uk)

9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

(Please leave a message on the answerphone)

Renal Ward

Churchill Hospital

Telephone: **01865 225 780**

24 hours, including weekends and bank holidays

Other sources of useful information

NHS Website

Website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/steroid-tablets

Oxford Kidney Unit

The Oxford Kidney Unit provides information for people with kidney conditions and their caregivers.

Website: www.ouh.nhs.uk/oku

OUH Patient Portal Health for Me

Please ask a member of the renal team to sign you up to the patient portal.

Website: www.ouh.nhs.uk/patient-guide/patient-portal

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Golnaz Pedari, Rotational Specialist Pharmacist
Jayne Woodhouse, Advanced Nurse Practitioner, Peritoneal Dialysis
Dr Ben Storey, Consultant Nephrologist

May 2026

Review: May 2029

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information



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charity@ouh.nhs.uk | 01865 743 444 | hospitalcharity.co.uk

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