

# STEROIDS

## STEROIDS DEFINITION:

*Steroids (short for corticosteroids) are synthetic drugs that closely resemble cortisol, a hormone that your body produces naturally. Steroids work by decreasing inflammation and reducing the activity of the immune system.*

- Corticosteroids are different from *anabolic* steroids, which some athletes use to build bigger muscles.
- Examples of corticosteroid medications include prednisone and methylprednisolone

## HOW ARE THEY GIVEN?

Steroids can be given topically (cream or ointment), by mouth (orally), or by injection directly into a joint or bursa (lubricating sac between certain tendons and the bones beneath them) or around tendons and other soft tissue areas.



## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF STEROIDS?

Low doses of steroids may provide significant relief from pain, swelling and stiffness.

Temporary use of higher doses of steroids may help a person recover from a severe flare-up of arthritis, gout, vasculitis or myositis.

**What Conditions Are Treated With Steroids?** Steroids are used to treat a variety of conditions in which the body's defense system malfunctions.

- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Lupus
- Sjögren's syndrome
- Gout
- Vasculitis (inflammation of blood vessels)
- Myositis (inflammation of muscle)

## WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF ORAL STEROIDS:

Side effects are more common with a higher dose and longer treatment. Common side effects of oral steroids include:

- Acne
- Blurred vision
- Cataracts or glaucoma
- Easy bruising
- Difficulty sleeping
- High blood pressure
- Increased appetite, weight gain
- Increased growth of body hair
- Insomnia
- Lower resistance to infection
- Muscle weakness
- Nervousness, restlessness
- Osteoporosis
- Stomach irritation or bleeding
- Sudden mood swings
- Swollen, puffy face
- Water retention, swelling
- Worsening of diabetes

## HOW CAN STEROID SIDE EFFECTS BE MINIMIZED?

- Use steroids only when necessary.
- Use the minimum dose required to gain control of the disease.
- Reduce the dose gradually as long as the disease remains under control.
- Recommend calcium supplements and vitamin D to help maintain bone strength (this is done especially if steroids will be taken for a long period of time).
- Have your bone density checked every one to two years.