

Please read the following information carefully if you have received treatment with steroids for COVID-19:

About steroids

Corticosteroids (such as dexamethasone, hydrocortisone and prednisolone), also known as 'steroids', reduce inflammation and are used to treat a range of conditions including asthma and arthritis. Dexamethasone was the first drug that was shown in trials to improve survival from COVID-19.

Most patients with COVID-19 are treated with steroids for 7 to 10 days. However, some patients with more severe disease may receive longer courses of treatment with steroids.

What this means for you

1. Longer treatment courses

If you have received steroid treatment for longer than the standard 7-10 day course, you will need your dose gradually reduced (known as 'weaning') before treatment is stopped completely. This allows your body to start producing its own steroids again. You may be given a National Steroid Treatment Card or a National Steroid Alert Card (or both),

In rare cases, people being weaned off steroids may experience symptoms of adrenal insufficiency (when the adrenal glands do not produce enough steroids to meet your body's requirements). These include low blood pressure, persistent dizziness or light-headedness, profound weakness, nausea and vomiting, abdominal pain or confusion.

If you experience any of these symptoms following a long course of steroid treatment, you should seek urgent medical attention (see "**What you should do**" below).

2. Blood sugar control

Steroids can affect your body's ability to control blood sugar levels. You may have raised blood sugar levels whilst on steroid treatment.

If you do not have diabetes mellitus:

- You will have had your blood glucose levels monitored while in hospital. Most of the time, your blood sugar levels will return to normal once steroids are stopped.
- If you are at risk of developing diabetes, you may need ongoing monitoring of your blood sugar levels.

If you are known to have diabetes mellitus:

- Your diabetes medicines and/or insulin treatment may have been amended during your stay in hospital.
- Once the steroids are stopped, your blood glucose levels may decrease and your diabetes treatment may need re-adjusting.
- You should have a discharge plan in place for your diabetes treatment and for ongoing monitoring in the community.

What you should do

You should attend your nearest Accident and Emergency Department and take your steroid cards with you if you experience any of the following symptoms: low blood pressure, persistent dizziness or light-headedness, profound weakness, nausea and vomiting, abdominal pain or confusion.

Please keep any appointments you have been given for ongoing monitoring of blood sugar levels.

If you have diabetes, please check that you have a clear discharge plan for your diabetes treatment and monitoring in the community.

More information

For more information on steroids and diabetes management on discharge please refer to:

https://www.diabetes.org.uk/resources-s3/public/2020-06/COvID_Patient_Discharge_v2.2.pdf

For more information on the National Steroid Alert Card please visit:

<https://www.addisonsdisease.org.uk/news/new-nhs-steroid-card-released>