

## What are steroids?

There are multiple types of steroids that occur naturally within the body. When ENT surgeons refer to steroids, we are generally referring to *corticosteroids*, which are produced naturally in the adrenal glands to help suppress bodily inflammation and cope with stress and anxiety. Steroids reduce swelling, prevent the migration of white blood cells, and stabilize the membrane of cells that release inflammatory mediators. The most commonly prescribed steroids are **prednisone** or **methylprednisolone** (Medrol dose pack).

**Steroids are commonly used to decrease inflammation, and may be used to treat disorders such as:**

- Allergies
- Asthma
- Sinusitis
- Nasal polyps
- Ear infections
- Sudden hearing loss
- Facial paralysis

A short course of steroids can boost your energy level, alleviate pain and nausea, block allergies, reduce swelling, shrink nasal polyps, alleviate asthma, and can even restore hearing in some patients with sudden deafness. However, steroids must be used with caution, because they can have significant addictive potential and cause serious side effects – especially with long-term use.

## Risks of Systemic Steroids

- **Short bursts of steroids often cause**
  - nervousness, sleeplessness, excitation, and sometimes depression or confusion. If you have a tendency for any mental health concern steroids can exacerbate symptoms. If this occurs call the doctor immediately.
  - elevation of blood sugar- you may need to monitor for this if you are prone to elevated blood sugar or have diabetes
  - elevation in blood pressure or change in salt balance
  - acid reflux and/or can aggravate ulcers- for this reason steroids should be taken in conjunction with an antacid/reflux medication
- **Prolonged use can result in suppression of normal steroid levels in the body**
  - These medications should be taken exactly as prescribed to avoid sudden withdrawal. Withdrawal symptoms are uncommon in patients who have used steroids for less than two weeks at a time.
- **Continued or repeated use of steroids can:**
  - reduce your ability to fight infection (cause immunosuppression)
  - cause body changes such as weight gain, fluid retention, acne, increased body hair, purple marks on the abdomen, collection of fatty deposits under the skin, and easy bruising
  - cause thinning of the bones or muscle weakness
  - cause eye changes such as glaucoma and cataracts
- **A very rare complication of steroids is interruption of the blood supply to the hip bone which can result in a fracture that requires a hip replacement- rare in short term use**

**Patients who are pregnant, have a history of stomach ulcers, glaucoma, diabetes, high blood pressure, tuberculosis, osteoporosis, or recent vaccination, should not take steroids unless absolutely necessary.**

Fortunately, all of these complications are extremely rare in patients treated with short-term doses of steroids. If your doctor has prescribed systemic steroids, he or she has likely judged that the risk of these complications is outweighed by the potential benefit for the treatment of your disease. If you have any questions about this information or the instructions on how to take your steroids, please speak with your doctor.