

Oral Steroids for Severe Skin and Scalp Problems

Severe skin and scalp problems may require a short course of oral steroid tablets. These have an effect over the whole body switching off inflammation. They are often used as a rapidly reducing course, starting with a number of tablets and decreasing by a tablet every few days or weeks. Short courses will vary from days to a couple of months.

Whilst short courses are not associated with long term side effects such as osteoporosis, they do have some short term side effects.

Mood

Oral steroids have a tendency to make you more manic, lifting mood to a happier state. They can make you more moody with highs and lows and in some patients they can exacerbate a low mood or depression.

Energy

Generally oral steroids will boost your energy levels, so you will rush around doing lots of things!

Sleep

Oral steroids may disturb sleep when used at high dose. It is best to take them all together early in the morning to avoid this. As the dose comes down the sleep disturbance improves.

Dyspepsia

Symptoms of acid reflux, such as burning, may be brought on or exacerbated by steroid use. Take the tablets with food to avoid this. Occasionally a tablet such as ranitidine can be used to deal with any burning pain.

Appetite

You are likely to experience an increase in appetite whilst on higher doses of steroids. You will need to be disciplined to prevent over eating and snacking.

Weight gain

Partly due to the stimulation of appetite and partly due to fluid retention, some weight gain is common. The fluid will disappear rapidly on stopping.

Blood Pressure

In older patients oral steroids may push the blood pressure up. It is sensible to have this checked weekly when on treatment. Most GP practices have machines in the waiting room or this can be checked with the practice nurse.

Blood Sugar

In susceptible patients, oral steroids can push the blood sugar up. If you have diabetes you may need to test your blood sugar more frequently and may need to have any diabetes medication you are taking altered in the short term.

