

# Oral Steroids for Breathing Problems

## What are these medicines used for?

Oral steroids may be taken for several days to treat asthma symptoms. They may also be taken every day as a controller medicine to treat severe asthma, chronic bronchitis, or emphysema. Chronic bronchitis and emphysema are also called chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD. You may need to take these medicines even if you are not having symptoms. They do not provide quick relief for acute attacks of wheezing. For acute attacks, you will need a different type of medicine called a reliever.

If you have asthma or COPD, you may have symptoms like coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Your symptoms are caused by two different problems in the airways.

- One problem is that the muscles in the airways tighten up, which causes the feeling of chest tightness and wheezing.
- The other problem is swelling, irritation and too much mucus in the airways.

If you have asthma, your symptoms often start after you are exposed to a trigger. Asthma triggers can include pollen, animals, mold, colds, exercise, cold air, and air pollutants. It is important to know what triggers your asthma so that you can avoid those things or take your reliever medicine before being around a trigger. You may notice that asthma symptoms come and go throughout the day or week and get better with medicine.

If you have COPD, your symptoms usually get worse over time and never completely go away.

## How do they work?

Oral steroids are similar to hormones made by your body. They block some of the chemicals that cause irritation and swelling. By lessening the swelling, you will have fewer symptoms and be able to breathe better.

Oral steroids can be taken as pills, chewable tablets, or syrup.

## What else do I need to know about this medicine?

- Follow the directions that come with your medicine, including information about food or alcohol. Make sure you know how and when to take your medicine. Do not take more or less than you are supposed to take.
- Try to get all of your prescriptions filled at the same place. Your pharmacist can help make sure that all of your medicines are safe to take together.
- Keep a list of your medicines with you. List all of the prescription medicines, nonprescription medicines, supplements, natural remedies, and vitamins that you take. Tell all healthcare providers who treat you about all of the products you are taking.

- Many medicines have side effects. A side effect is a symptom or problem that is caused by the medicine. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist what side effects the medicine may cause and what you should do if you have side effects.

If you have any questions, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for more information. Be sure to keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

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