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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Steroids and Diabetes

– on Insulin (page 1 of 2)

Your doctor has just started you on some steroid tablets.

If you have diabetes, the blood sugar may rise due to the steroid tablets. To control this you may need extra Insulin. We hope this guidance will help.

What Is likely to happen to my sugars?

Most people taking steroids start on a dose first thing in the morning. If, as a result, the sugars do rise the effect will be greatest towards the end of the day (ie tea time and bed time). Sometimes people are on steroids more than once a day and then the sugars may rise throughout the day.

Will I get any symptoms?

Not always.

The most common ones are:

- Thirst and/or drinking more than normal
- Passing water more than normal and passing water at night
- If the sugars are very high you may also notice some blurred vision.

If you get any of these symptoms it is important to discuss them with the diabetes team or your doctor.

Will my insulin doses be affected?

As soon as you are started on steroids we would recommend that you discuss your diabetes with the diabetes nurses here at the hospital (telephone number 01722 425176 leave a message with a contact number and they will phone you back). If you are an inpatient, the team looking after you will contact the diabetes nurses for you.

The diabetes nurses may recommend an increase in insulin dose to prevent the expected rise in blood sugars when starting your steroids.

It is important to know what is happening to your blood sugars when starting steroids – to look at this we would recommend checking your blood sugars before each meal and at bed time (usually 4 times per day). Whatever happens we would suggest talking through the results with the diabetes nurses after 48 hours.

If you develop symptoms or your blood sugars are rising to more than 15 at any time we would suggest discussion as early as possible (i.e before 48 hours if needed – if you are at home and this is over a weekend it would

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be important to discuss this with the out of hours GP).

What will happen when my steroids are stopped?

Your doctor will advise how long you will need to be on the steroid tablets.

If you are just having a short course then when the tablets are stopped you should go back on your usual doses of insulin. It is worth noting down how your insulin doses were adjusted as this will help you and the diabetes team if you need to go on steroids again.

If you are on a slowly reducing course of steroids over a longer period of time, you may need to reduce your insulin doses with each dose reduction. We would recommend discussing these changes with the diabetes nurses.

If you have queries at any time, please contact either the diabetes nurses at the hospital or your GP team.