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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

Your doctor has started, or is just about to start you on some steroid tablets.

When people are on steroids there is a chance that they can cause the sugar level in the blood to rise – this is a particular problem in people who are known to have diabetes.

Sometimes people can have diabetes and do not know it because it does not always show symptoms. We therefore recommend that all people who go on to steroid tablets have a blood test to check whether they have diabetes.

To do this your doctor will usually ask you to have a blood test first thing in the morning with nothing to eat or drink from midnight the night before.

What happens if the blood sugar test is high?

If the sugar level in the blood is high you might have diabetes, the blood test will need to be repeated to confirm the result. If the result is confirmed then you will be given help, support and advice about managing the condition.

If you do have newly diagnosed diabetes, and as you are going on steroid tablets, we will show you how to check the sugar in your blood and will give you more information about that.

Sometimes, if you need to start steroids immediately, your doctor will check sugar levels there and then, rather than arrange a fasting sample. This on its own is not enough to tell that someone has diabetes, but if that initial test was raised your doctor would arrange for one of the diabetes nurses to show you how to check your sugars at home after going on the steroid tablets. This is just to see whether the sugars go up. If you are asked to do that the diabetes nurses will stay in touch with you and give you further help and advice as needed.

What if the blood test is normal

That is reassuring.

Occasionally, being on steroid tablets will make the sugars go up even if you don't have diabetes.

We would just advise you to look out for symptoms – most commonly thirst, passing water more than normal and starting to get up at night to pass water – if these occur then please see your doctor to discuss this.

Diabetes & Endocrinology
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