

Part of the IMF Patient Education Tools Series

Managing Steroid-Associated Side Effects of Novel Agents for Multiple Myeloma

Patient Education Sheet: Managing Steroid-Associated Side Effects of Novel Agents for Multiple Myeloma

KEY POINTS

Steroids have been an effective treatment for multiple myeloma, alone and in combination with other drugs, for many years and still are used as an important part of treatment with newer drugs known as novel therapies (thalidomide, lenalidomide, and bortezomib). Steroids cause a wide range of side effects, affecting nearly every system of the body. Identifying the side effects early and managing them quickly will contribute to successful treatment and ultimately improve overall quality of life. Do not stop or adjust your medications without discussing it with your healthcare provider.

Steroids commonly prescribed include dexamethasone, prednisone, prednisolone, and solumedrol.

POTENTIAL SIDE EFFECTS

- "Let down" or withdrawal effect
- Flushing and sweating
- Difficulty sleeping (insomnia)
- Sexual dysfunction
- Personality changes or mood alterations
- Hyperactivity and jitters
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased numbers of white blood cells
- Infection
- Muscle weakness (myopathy)
- Death of bone tissue (avascular necrosis)
- Decrease in bone strength (osteopenia or osteoporosis)
- Muscle cramps
- Weight gain in body or face
- Changes affecting hair
- Blurred vision
- Cataract formation
- Ulcers and heartburn (dyspepsia)

Note. For more information, please contact the International Myeloma Foundation (1-800-452-CURE; www.myeloma.org). The foundation offers the Myeloma Manager™ Personal Care Assistant™ computer program to help patients and healthcare providers keep track of information and treatments. Visit <http://manager.myeloma.org> to download the free software.

Note. Patient education sheets were developed in June 2008 based on the International Myeloma Foundation Nurse Leadership Board's consensus guidelines. They may be reproduced for noncommercial use.

- Gas (flatulence)
- Increased appetite
- Changes in taste
- Hiccoughs
- Higher blood sugar levels
- Temporary diabetes or thyroid issues
- Temporary decrease in testicular size
- Swelling of the hands, legs, or feet
- Acne or rashes
- Thinning of skin

STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUING TREATMENT

Steroids should be taken with food.

Steroids can cause sleeplessness and therefore should be taken early in the morning.

Signs and symptoms of infection: fever of more than 100.5°F (38°C), shaking chills even without fever, dizziness, shortness of breath, and low blood pressure

Patients should take an over-the-counter or prescription medication to prevent gastrointestinal issues.

Medications to prevent infection, shingles (small blister-like rash anywhere on the body; usually painful with or without rash), and thrush (white coating on tongue, bad taste, and painful swallowing) also may be prescribed.

Know the signs and symptoms of high and low blood sugar: aggressiveness, confusion, difficulty waking, increased thirst, and frequent urination. If you have known diabetes, consult with your endocrinologist or diabetes educator prior to starting treatment with steroids.

Always report symptoms to your healthcare team as soon as they occur.



INTERNATIONAL MYELOMA FOUNDATION
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