

FIGURE 5.

PATIENT EDUCATION TIP SHEET: DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CONTINUING TREATMENT AFTER CORTICOSTEROID SIDE EFFECTS

Steroids commonly prescribed for multiple myeloma treatment include dexamethasone, prednisone, prednisolone, and methylprednisolone.

STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUING TREATMENT

- Steroids are commonly taken on a highly regular schedule (e.g., once per week). Side effects commonly follow a predictable pattern, particularly those affecting mood and energy.
- Maintain a symptom journal to help identify the pattern of any side effects and aid recall of side effects to discuss with your healthcare provider. Learning the pattern of side effects allows you to adapt your lifestyle to accommodate mood and energy levels.
- Patients may find that exercise or simple activities can help “burn off” the hyperactivity or jitters that steroids may cause. Relaxation, meditation, or mindfulness techniques can also help.
- Caregivers may identify mood and behavior changes in patients with multiple myeloma on steroids in advance of the patient. Caregivers should talk with the healthcare provider if they are concerned at the degree of these changes.
- Steroids should be taken with food.
- Patients should take an over-the-counter or prescription medication to prevent gastrointestinal issues.

- Steroids can cause sleeplessness and should be taken early in the morning. In some cases, the increased energy caused by taking steroids has a delayed effect. As such, taking steroids in the evening may allow improved sleep patterns.
- Be aware of symptoms of infection: a fever of more than 100.5° F (38°C), shaking chills even without fever, dizziness, shortness of breath, and low blood pressure. Contact your healthcare provider if these symptoms occur.
- 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) may also be prescribed.
- Know the signs and symptoms of high and low blood sugar (e.g., aggressiveness, confusion, difficulty waking, increased thirst, frequent urination). If you have diabetes, consult with your endocrinologist or diabetes educator before starting treatment with steroids.
- Always report any concerning symptoms to your healthcare team as soon as they occur.

Note. From “Steroid-Associated Side Effects: A Symptom Management Update on Multiple Myeloma Treatment,” by T. King & B. Faiman, 2017, *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*, 21, pp. 242–243. Copyright 2017 by Oncology Nursing Society. Adapted with permission.