

STEROID THERAPY & BLOOD SUGARS

During Cancer Treatment

How Do Steroids Affect Me?

Cancer treatments often need supportive medicines called steroids. Steroids may raise the level of sugar in your blood. Keeping your blood sugar in a normal range can help you heal, and keep your organs safe.

Common names of these medicines are:

- Dexamethasone (Decadron)
- Prednisone
- Hydrocortisone/Cortisone

Steroids also have side effects that are not related to increased blood sugars. These include:

- Increased hunger
- Weight gain
- Swelling
- Sleep concerns
- Mood swings

Remember

Never stop taking your steroids without talking to your Oncologist (cancer doctor).

If you have any of these side effects, talk to your cancer healthcare team at your next visit.

What Are the Symptoms of High Blood Sugar?

If your blood sugar is high, you may have symptoms like:

- Blurry vision
- Dry mouth
- Feeling thirsty
- Genital yeast infections
- Stomach pains or cramps
- Peeing more than usual
- Feeling tired or weak

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms while on a steroid, it is very important to call your healthcare team at the cancer centre as soon as possible.

Monitor Your Blood Sugar

If You Do Not Have Diabetes

When starting steroids, your cancer healthcare team will monitor (watch) your blood sugar levels through your regular blood work. If you **do not** have diabetes but your blood sugar becomes high, you may be diagnosed with steroid-induced diabetes. You will be referred to a Diabetes Education Program, or you can self-refer. They will teach you the skills you need to monitor your blood sugar levels at home.

If You Already Have Diabetes

If you have prediabetes, Type 1, or Type 2 diabetes and are taking steroids, you may find it harder to keep your blood sugar levels in target. Tell your family doctor or endocrinologist that you will be taking steroids, so they can adjust your medicine(s) if needed.

You may also need to test your blood sugar more often. If you are not already testing your sugars, talk to your doctor or Diabetes Education Program (DEP). Often, you can get a blood sugar meter from them, or at your local pharmacy.



Keep a Record of Your Sugars

Keeping a log of your blood sugars will help you to know when to contact your family doctor, endocrinologist, or DEP.

Your diabetes medicine(s) may need to be changed if sugars are often:

- Less than 4 mmol/L
- Greater than 7.0 mmol/L in the morning
- Greater than 11.2 mmol/L during the day

Contact your family doctor, endocrinologist, or DEP to talk about your blood sugars. They will work with you to figure out possible causes of your high/low blood sugars. Keeping a record of when your sugars are low/high may help with trends and management.



Go to an Emergency Department near you if:

- You have a blood sugar reading over 18mmol/L and you feel unwell, throw up, or cannot drink any water.
- You have a blood sugar reading over 25mmol/L or “HI” reading.

How Can I Take Care of Myself?

- Attend a local Diabetes Education Program.
- Take medicine exactly as prescribed by your doctor or endocrinologist.
- Aim for 150 minutes of physical activity each week.
 - For a structured fitness program, ask your cancer healthcare team about the University of Waterloo WELL-FIT program.
- Make food choices that support your blood sugar goals. Diet plays a key role in managing blood sugar levels, fuels your body, and can help keep blood sugars stable.
 - DEPs have Registered Dietitians on staff to support you with choices to help your blood sugars.

Food Tips to Help Manage Blood Sugars	Food Sources of Carbohydrates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat at regular times each day • Add healthy snacks in between meals, if needed • Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy every day • Limit sugars, regular pop, juices, desserts, candies, jams, and honey • If thirsty, choose water as your main drink. You may also enjoy tea, sparkling water, or artificially sweetened drinks. 	<p>Carbohydrates give your body the energy it needs for activity and organ function. Carbohydrates are naturally found in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grains and starches (bread, cereal, rice, corn, potatoes, pasta) • Fruits and some starchy vegetables • Legumes (beans, chickpeas, or lentils) • Milk and milk products (cows milk, yogurt, soymilk, rice milk) • Honey and maple syrup

Resources

Scan the QR Code or click the blue link below to access the resources online. For printed copies, visit the J. Wesley Graham Patient & Family Resource Centre at WRHN Cancer Centre (J339).



[Diabetes Canada](#)




[Nutrition & Fitness - Diabetes Canada](#)



[WELL-FIT Exercise Program](#)

Connect with a Diabetes Education Program

Looking for help to manage your blood sugars? There are diabetes education teams across Waterloo Wellington. They have Certified Diabetes Educators (like Registered Nurses, Registered Dietitians, and Social Workers) who are specially trained to help people living with diabetes. All referrals go through [Waterloo Wellington Diabetes](#).

You can self refer to Waterloo Wellington Diabetes if you have a confirmed diagnosis of:

- Type 1 Diabetes
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Prediabetes
- Steroid-Induced diabetes
- Or are at high risk for diabetes

Waterloo Wellington Diabetes



519-947-1000 extension 372



info@waterloowellingtondiabetes.ca



www.waterloowellingtondiabetes.ca

Use this resource for your information only. It does not replace medical advice from your doctor or other healthcare professionals.



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