



Inhaled steroids have few side effects. They are generally safe when used in recommended doses.

What are inhaled steroids?

Inhaled steroids are medicines that reduce swelling in the airways of the lungs. If you or your child has asthma, your doctor may prescribe inhaled steroids for use every day to prevent asthma flare-ups. You or your child breathes inhaled steroids (such as *QVAR*, *Asmanex*, *Flovent* or *Pulmicort*) into the lungs. They are similar to a hormone called “cortisone” that our bodies make naturally. Inhaled steroids help the airways to become less sensitive to the things that “trigger” asthma, so they make breathing easier. Since inhaled steroids do not work right away, it may take some time for you or your child to feel the benefits.

Are inhaled steroids the same as steroids body builders use?

No. Some body builders may use testosterone, a type of “anabolic” hormone to “bulk up.” Testosterone is very different from the inhaled steroid you or your child uses to control asthma. The inhaled steroids do not build muscle or improve performance.

In fact, using inhaled steroids allows athletes with asthma to breathe easier and to participate fully in sports.

What about side effects?

Inhaled steroids have few side effects. They are generally safe when used in the low doses that are usually prescribed. There can be a higher risk of side effects if you or your child uses high doses of inhaled steroids.

Tips to prevent or reduce the risk of ...

- Yeast infection in your mouth (thrush):
 - Always use your inhaler with a spacer. Check with your doctor about the correct spacer for you or your child.
 - Always rinse out your mouth (rinse and spit) after you take the medicine.
 - Use your inhaler before you brush your teeth.
- Cough, hoarseness, or husky voice:
 - Rinse your mouth, gargling with water and spitting out, to remove any medicine left in your mouth.

Taking inhaled steroids has fewer risks than not controlling your asthma!

How can I use the least amount of inhaled steroids to control my or my child's asthma?

One way to reduce the amount of inhaled steroid you or your child takes is to **control and avoid asthma triggers**. You may be able to use less medicine if you reduce or avoid your asthma triggers (such as indoor pets, dust mites, cockroaches, pollen, cigarette and fire-place smoke, or strong odors). Managing your asthma with the least amount of medicine needed can help reduce any side effects you may have.

If you are on a high dose of inhaled steroids ask your doctor if you might be able to take another medication that can help lower the dose you need.

Commonly asked questions about inhaled steroids

Is there an increased risk of cataracts and glaucoma with inhaled steroids?

Some recent studies have suggested that patients over 65 on high doses of inhaled steroids may have a greater risk of getting cataracts and glaucoma. Patients using lower doses of inhaled steroids do not appear to be at higher risk of glaucoma. If you are taking high doses of inhaled

steroids, check with your doctor, especially if you have glaucoma or one of these risk factors for glaucoma:

- diabetes mellitus (high sugar in your blood)
- extreme nearsightedness
- a blood relative with glaucoma

Your doctor may refer you to have your eyes checked by an eye specialist.

Is there an increased risk of osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) with inhaled steroids?

This issue is still being studied and we don't have all the answers yet. Some studies suggest that taking inhaled steroids can increase the risk of osteoporosis. Anyone can decrease their chances of osteoporosis (whether or not you are taking inhaled steroids) with regular physical activity. Taking a calcium supplement (1,000 – 1,500 mg/day) and vitamin D (400 units/ day, the dose in most multiple vitamins) may help prevent bone thinning. If you have questions about any of these preventive measures, check with your doctor.

Will inhaled steroids affect my child's growth?

During the first year using inhaled steroids a child's growth may be slightly affected. On average, studies show that it can

slow growth by a half inch. After the first year of treatment, the child's growth rate "catches up" and returns to normal. When used regularly, inhaled steroids are the best medicines to control asthma. Asthma that is not controlled causes growth to slow as well. Be sure to work with your child's doctor to find the lowest dose of inhaled steroids to keep asthma well-controlled.

Can I become addicted to inhaled steroids?

No. Inhaled steroids are not addictive. However, you must use them regularly to get the full benefit.

Are inhaled steroids safe to use during pregnancy?

Inhaled steroids are generally safe to use during pregnancy in the usual recommended doses. Be sure to let your doctor know right away if you are pregnant. He or she may need to change your inhaled steroid to a different brand.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.