

Risk for Adrenal Crisis

People with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) who take steroid medicine (like prednisone or deflazacort) may be more likely to have adrenal insufficiency (when the adrenal glands don't make enough hormones) and adrenal crisis (medical emergency when the body doesn't have enough of the hormone cortisol). It is important to know the warning signs and when to get emergency help.

How do Steroids Affect your Body's Cortisol Production?

Your body makes a hormone called cortisol in the adrenal glands. These small glands sit on top of the kidneys. Cortisol (stress hormone) helps your body handle sickness, surgery, injury, and other stress.

When you take steroid medicine for a long time, your body thinks it already has enough cortisol. Because of this, your body may stop making its own cortisol. This means, if you all of a sudden stop taking steroid medication, or if you get sick and need extra cortisol, your body may not be able to make enough. This can cause an adrenal crisis.

What is an Adrenal Crisis?

An adrenal crisis is a dangerous medical emergency. It happens when your body does not have enough cortisol to deal with stress. It can happen during a bad infection, high fever, surgery, major injury, or when steroids are stopped or missed.

What are the Warning Signs of an Adrenal Crisis?

You and your family should watch for these signs, especially if you are sick, hurt or stressed:

- Vomiting, especially if you cannot keep down your steroid pills
- Feeling very tired or weak
- Confusion or headache
- Dizziness or feeling faint
- Fast heartbeat
- Fever
- Muscle pain or cramps

What Should You Do if You Think You're Having an Adrenal Crisis?

1. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room
2. Tell the nurses and doctors: "I take steroids for Duchenne muscular dystrophy."

Remember:

Adrenal crisis in DMD is unusual, but it can be dangerous if not treated quickly. The good news is you can help prevent this by taking your steroids exactly as the doctors tells you and getting emergency help if warning signs appear.