



Sick Day Rules

Information for patients on long-term
steroid hormone replacement therapy
(Hydrocortisone, Prednisolone, Dexamethasone)

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What are 'sick day rules'?

- 'Sick day rules' give you advice on how to manage your usual steroid medication if you are unwell (for example, if you have the 'flu').

What is hydrocortisone?

- Hydrocortisone works like naturally occurring cortisol, a steroid hormone we need for life. It is the most commonly used steroid prescribed to patients requiring replacement therapy for adrenal insufficiency. Cortisol plays many vital roles in maintaining and regulating healthy body functions and is essential for survival.
- Some patients may be prescribed with different forms of steroids (for example; prednisolone, Plenadren or dexamethasone – these are longer acting steroids)depending on their needs. You will be given specific advice if you are on any of the steroids listed above.

How should I take my hydrocortisone?

- The usual dose of hydrocortisone is 15–25 milligrams split in two to three doses throughout the day. Hydrocortisone is taken orally.
- Hydrocortisone can be taken on an empty stomach or with food.
- The first dose should be taken immediately after waking up, the second dose after lunch and if you take a third dose, it should not be taken after 5pm as this may disturb your sleep.

What should I do if I'm ill?

- If you become ill, your body would naturally increase the output of steroid hormones from your adrenals (glands). Therefore if you are taking replacement steroids, it is essential to mimic the natural response by increasing your dose appropriately.
- The table below gives you simple advice on when and how to increase your dose of steroids.
- Remember that taking a higher dose of steroids for a short period of time whilst you are ill is necessary and is not harmful. You do not need to change the doses of any other hormone tablets you take regularly.

Travelling abroad

- When travelling abroad, it is advised that you take twice the amount of steroids you need in case you have to double your dose due to illness.
- It is also useful to take a hydrocortisone injection kit with you in case of emergency, especially if you are visiting remote areas. You can get this kit from your Endocrinologist or your GP. If travelling abroad, you will need a letter from your doctor or specialist nurse explaining what the injection kit is for.
- If you need training on how to use the emergency hydrocortisone injection kit, please contact your key worker below.

Other important advice

- It is a good idea to purchase a 'MedicAlert' bracelet or necklace and carry a blue steroid card at all times.

Sick day rule 1	<p>Double your usual dose of steroids during:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> periods of illness with fever, or illness requiring bedrest; or illness requiring treatment with antibiotics
Sick day rule 2	<p>Inject hydrocortisone intramuscularly (directly into the muscle), subcutaneously (underneath the skin) or in hospital, intravenously (within a vein) during:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> periods of severe illness; persistent vomiting or diarrhoea; fasting (absence of food or drink) for a procedure requiring general anaesthesia; surgery (inform your endocrinologist before surgery so that proper advice can be given to your surgeon/doctor).

- **Other rules to consider: Pregnancy** – if you become pregnant, contact your endocrinologist for advice regarding your steroid medication.
- **Before major physical activity** – depending on the degree of physical activity, patients might benefit from taking a small dose of steroid (for example 2.5 –5 mg of hydrocortisone) before engaging in major activity such as long distance running/marathon, major sports or competitive dancing.

If in doubt or if you need advice, contact your key worker or endocrinologist

For any queries and advice please contact:

- **Your hospital key worker:** _____
Tel: 0121 371 6950
Email: EndocrineNurses@uhb.nhs.uk
- **UK Addison's Disease Self Help Group**
www.adshg.org.uk
- **The Pituitary Foundation**
www.pituitary.org.uk
- **MedicAlert**
www.medicalert.org.uk
Freephone: 0800 581 420



The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/health-talks.htm or call 0121 371 4323.

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