

Coping With Corticosteroids

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The advent of Corticosteroids has revolutionized the treatment of various inflammatory and auto immune disorders. They provide the answer to everything ranging from a cosmetically disfiguring skin condition to a life threatening anaphylactic shock. But the flip side to the coin is the wide spectrum of horrifying side effects that accompany the chronic use of these drugs. Side effects range from trivial irritants such as oral ulceration to grossly debilitating conditions like osteoporosis. Needless to say, the most commonly seen side effects like moon face, weight gain and buffalo hump which adversely alter physical appearance are highly unacceptable to most patients, especially women, directly affecting patient compliance. It is unfortunate that in this day and age the medical fraternity has turned a blind eye to the physical and mental agony faced by the patients on a chronic regimen of corticosteroids. Most physicians do not give adequate pre medication counseling nor do they prescribe any preventive measures to minimize this misery. We must keep in the mind that these patients are already suffering from a

chronic and often serious disorder. The aim of medical science is to ameliorate this suffering, not add to it. No doubt some degree of adverse effects are unavoidable, but we can optimize the situation and prevent most major issues by suggesting certain simple precautions. This study has been undertaken to analyze what are the commonly encountered side effects and how they can be tackled and reduced to a bare minimum by following simple and effective techniques. These methods can be employed directly by patients or can be used by health educators as part of a pre treatment counseling programme. The first part of the study deals with side effects. A large cohort of patients taking corticosteroids on a long term basis were analyzed. Some of the pertinent questions addressed the following issues :- what percentage of patients were given pre treatment counseling, whether it was adequate or not, what were the points covered and whether or not compliance was effected. The results of the study have been evaluated and summarized. The next part of this study deals with solutions. I have attempted to integrate the wisdom of senior physicians, patients' personal experiences with the drug, and even indigenous system of medicines found in Ayurveda to provide sustainable and do-able solutions.