

How do corticosteroids affect my child's nutrition?

Corticosteroids (for example Prednisolone, Prednisone, Pediapred®, Orapred®, Dexamethasone) are medicines that control inflammation or swelling. If your child takes a corticosteroid medicine longer than one to two weeks, the medicine can change your child's appetite and nutritional needs. Children who take corticosteroids often have more of an appetite, gain weight, have higher blood pressure, have high blood sugar levels, and calcium and vitamin D deficiency.

How can I help when my child is taking corticosteroids?

Weight gain

Increased appetite is a common side effect of corticosteroids. If weight gain is a problem, offer your child lower calorie foods and drinks, avoid high fat foods and snacks. Encourage regular exercise.

Higher blood pressure

Corticosteroids may cause higher blood pressure levels. Your child's doctor should routinely check your child's blood pressure. The first step when treating high blood pressure is to eat less salt. You can help your child by not using salt at the table and not offering her high salt foods such as pretzels, chips, crackers, jerky, canned soups, and canned pastas.

Higher blood sugar levels

Corticosteroids may increase your child's blood sugar levels. If this becomes a problem you may

Corticosteroids and nutrition

Recommended intake amounts for calcium and vitamin D		
Age (years)	Calcium (milligrams per day)	Vitamin D (International Units per day)
1-5	800-1200	400
6-8	1200	400
>9	1500	600-800

need to talk to a dietitian about changing your child's diet to help with her high blood sugar levels.

Calcium and vitamin D

If your child takes corticosteroids for a long time, it may affect her bone development. The right amount of calcium and vitamin D in their diet will help keep your child's bones growing properly. Dairy foods and fortified soymilks are the most common source of calcium. Daily sun exposure and dairy foods will provide enough vitamin D. Your child should have two to three servings of dairy foods daily. One cup of milk or yogurt is one serving. One to 1.5 oz of cheese is one serving. If you are still concerned that your child is not getting enough calcium or vitamin D, she should take a supplement. Your child can generally get enough vitamin D if she takes a daily multivitamin, and enough calcium if she takes a calcium supplement. Do not give your child more than 500 mg of calcium at a time. If you give more than this amount, she may not be able to use it all. She may need to take a calcium supplement two to three times a day. If you have further questions, contact your healthcare provider or a dietitian.



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