Before you take your tablets

- Have you ever been told that you are allergic to steroids?
- Have you ever had tuberculosis (TB), diabetes, epilepsy, depression, glaucoma (raised eye pressure), hypertension (high blood pressure), osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) or stomach ulcers?
- Do you have liver or heart disease?
- Have you just been immunised or vaccinated?
- Do you have a viral infection (chicken pox, for example) or any other infection?
- Have you ever been in contact with anyone who has chicken pox?
- Do you think that you may be pregnant?
- Are you taking any other medicines?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, did you tell the doctor?

If not, you should speak to your doctor as soon as possible, before starting the tablets.

Your doctor may still want you to take them.

Some common questions answered

I’ve missed a dose. What should I do?
If you forget to take a dose, take another as soon as possible. Then go on as before.

I’ve taken too many tablets at once. What should I do?
It is important to stick to the instructions given on the label or by your doctor. Taking more than this could be dangerous, especially if too many tablets are taken at one time. If this is the case, don’t delay; ask your doctor what to do or contact the nearest hospital accident and emergency department.

I’m not getting better. What should I do?
If you have taken all the course of tablets and you still feel unwell, or if you have not taken all the tablets but feel worse tell your doctor. Steroid tablets are only used when your doctor considers that the benefits outweigh the risk of side effects. Before prescribing them, your doctor will have discussed the pros and cons with you and explained why you need to take them, the dose to take, and for how long.

If there is anything you are unsure about, please ask again.

Medicine Information Department, Pharmacy
PRH 01444 441881 Ext. 8153/8566.
Your doctor has prescribed one of the following medicines for you to take:

Prednisolone  Dexamethasone  Hydrocortisone

This leaflet provides information that is common to all of them. If you need more specific information, please contact your doctor or pharmacist.

What do the tablets do?
The steroid tablets you have been given are not the same as anabolic steroids, which are misused by some bodybuilders. Your steroids (or corticosteroids) are prescribed for the treatment of many different diseases. They are strong medicines which mainly work by reducing inflammation in the body.

If you are not sure why you are on these tablets, make sure you ask the doctor who prescribed them.

What if I am a diabetic?
Starting steroids might interfere with your diabetic control and changes to your diabetic treatment may be needed. Make sure you discuss this with the doctor who looks after your diabetes.

What should I do after starting the tablets?
You may start to feel better after a few days, but do not stop taking the tablets unless your doctor tells you to.

What if I have to take the tablets for more than two weeks?
Do not suddenly stop taking the tablets unless your doctor tells you to; you could become ill. Make sure your supply of tablets does not run out.

Are there any side effects?
Most people taking steroids find they cause no problem if taken at the lowest possible dose for the shortest possible time. As with most medicines, a few people may find the tablets have side effects. If you have to take these tablets for a long time your doctor will prescribe as small a dose as possible.

High doses taken for a very long time (months or years) or repeated short courses every few weeks can lead to side effects such as skin thinning, stretch marks, 'moon (rounded) face', weight gain due to increased appetite, acne, eye problems (cataracts or glaucoma), bone thinning or damage, stomach ulcers, irregular monthly periods, raised blood sugar, oedema (swelling, particularly around the ankles, due to fluid), mood changes (euphoria, depression or irritation), or, rarely, muscle weakness. Most of those problems can be reversed by lowering the dose.

In children high doses for a long time can stunt growth.

Steroids make it easier for you to pick up infections and they can make infections such as chicken pox worse. If you catch chicken pox, or have been in contact recently with anyone who has had chicken pox, please speak to your doctor immediately. It is also important that you speak to your doctor if you catch chicken pox within three months of stopping your steroids.

If you feel unwell during your course of treatment, or have any unusual discomfort that you do not understand, speak to your doctor.

If you are concerned about the dose or duration of your treatment, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.