

## Steroids—when and how they should be used

“Steroid, glucocorticoids, hydrocortisone, prednisone, prednisolone, dexamethasone, Depo-Medrol, Vetalog, triamcinolone”—all are names of various steroids. The short-acting being hydrocortisone, prednisone, and prednisolone. Short-acting is important as they don’t last very long in the body. Why is that important? Your adrenal glands produce your own “natural cortisone” which is essential for life. When you or your pet are given steroids, it inhibits your body from producing its own natural cortisone—kind of puts your adrenal glands on vacation. This occurs if the pet is on steroids for a prolonged period of time. What is the danger of this? Long-term steroid use affects every organ of the body—thins the skin, causes ligaments to be weakened leading to ACL tears or “big belly”, cataracts, muscle weakness (including the heart), diabetes, increased incidence of infections-skin, lung, and bladder. Most people whose dogs are on steroids notice increased thirst, appetite, and urination and complain about these side effects. What is more important are the side effects mentioned above, the internal ones that you can’t see! In cats, prolonged steroid use (includes repeated Depo-Medrol injections) may lead to heart disease, thin skin that tears easily, or diabetes.

Most humans who have been prescribed steroids by their doctor realize the potency of these drugs and do not want their pet taking them. There are valid instances where a pet will be prescribed steroids such as immune mediated diseases, relief of allergy symptoms (short term only), or to reduce swelling. But there are many alternatives to long-term steroid use for almost all diseases—be sure and ask us or your veterinarian to pursue these alternatives! As a pharmacist and veterinary dermatologist, Dr. Jeromin is very aware and cautious of steroid use and believes they have a place in therapy but short-term only.

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