



Corticosteroids

ITP is an autoimmune disorder that causes destruction of platelets. Platelets are blood cells that help to form blood clots when necessary. A common first approach to managing ITP is a corticosteroid medication such as prednisone. Corticosteroids decrease the amount of platelets being destroyed. This piece will help you understand what corticosteroids are, how they might help, and the possible side effects.

What are corticosteroids?

Corticosteroids are a family of hormones (and synthetic derivatives) that are related to cholesterol, estrogen, and vitamin D that have a wide variety of functions in the body. Prednisone and dexamethasone are corticosteroids that are used to treat ITP. Therapeutic corticosteroids have applications in many diseases, but also have multiple side effects. Corticosteroids reduce inflammation, and in ITP, they work by inhibiting the destruction of platelets. Prednisone and dexamethasone are usually given as pills, but sometimes they are injected. Various doses and lengths of treatment are recommended, so it is important to follow your doctor's instructions carefully.

How effective is prednisone for ITP?

Most adults with ITP are treated initially with prednisone, which is effective in 50 to 80% of individuals within 3 to 4 weeks. A large number of adults (70 to 90%) experience a relapse of ITP when the drug is reduced or stopped, so another form of therapy is often required.

What side effects may occur with prednisone?

Some patients experience indigestion, weight gain, high blood pressure, acne, nervousness or restlessness. Consult with your doctor if these symptoms persist. Possible long-term effects include osteoporosis, bone fractures, immunosuppression, glaucoma, and cataracts. Corticosteroids may reduce your body's ability to fight infection.

Summary

Corticosteroids are a first-line treatment in many patients with ITP. They are frequently effective in raising the platelet count and in alleviating symptoms; however, they are not effective in all individuals. The risk of side effects limits the recommended dose and length of time you can take them. Your doctor will determine the best treatment for you, and you should consult your physician if you experience side effects or a change in your physical or mental health.

Resources

Your primary resource should be your doctor or health care provider. Other information can be found on the Web or in your local library. Some useful sites are:

- <http://www.itpeducation.com>
- <http://www.hematology.org>
- ASH Guidelines: <http://www.hematology.org/policy/guidelines/idiopathic.cfm>