Cleveland Clinic

I.V. Steroid Treatment for Multiple Sclerosis

Your health care provider has ordered the medicine methylprednisolone (Solu-Medrol®) for treatment of multiple sclerosis. Methylprednisolone is a potent anti-inflammatory steroid that might improve your symptoms.

The treatment takes place at the Mellen Center or per Home Care each day for 1 to 5 days, depending on your treatment plan. The appointment dates and times will be arranged by the appointment office at the Mellen Center.

For appointment information, please call 216.444.8600 or 1.800.223.2273, ext. 48600. If you have never had IV methylprednisolone before you will need to have the first dose at the Mellen Center.

What can I expect from my day of treatment at the Mellen Center?

- Plan to be at the Mellen Center for about one and a half hours on the day(s) of your treatment. You will have blood tests before the treatment (to monitor your blood count, and sodium and potassium levels) or urine tests to rule out a bladder infection.

- The nurse will also check your blood pressure and pulse before and after the treatment.

- The medicine is given by intravenous drip for 30 to 45 minutes.

- After the treatment, you can return to your normal daily activities, including driving.

- Following the intravenous treatments, you might be asked to take an oral form of a steroid called prednisone. Your health care provider will give you a written schedule of when and how often to take the medicine.

- You might also be given a prescription for a medicine to reduce stomach irritation and possibly a medication to assist with sleep during the time you are on medication.

The Mellen Center might make arrangements for treatments to be given at your home by Home Care Services.

Corticosteroids may pass into the breast milk, so check with the pediatrician if you are nursing. Birth defects are possible due to steroids; you need to be on birth control while on steroids.
What are some possible side effects?

Common side effects of this medicine include the following. It’s important to remember that not everyone experiences these side effects.

**Short term:**
- Metallic taste in the mouth
- Flushing of the face, neck, or chest
- Rapid heartbeat, elevated blood pressure
- Feeling warm or cool
- Stomach irritation such as indigestion and heartburn
- Increased energy, which might result in difficulty sleeping
- Retaining fluid (Avoid table salt and salty foods.)
- Mood changes (euphoria, irritability, nervousness, restlessness)
- Increase in blood sugar level
- Stretch marks, especially with weight gain
- Increase risk of infection
- Change in vision
- Insomnia

**Long term:**
- Joint problems (some cases of hip or shoulder joint injury due to steroids)
- Thinning of the bones (osteoporosis)
- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- Cataracts
- Rounding of the face
- Irregular heart beat
- Menstrual problems
- Slow healing

If you have diabetes or glucose (sugar) intolerance

Steroids will usually raise blood levels of glucose (sugar) during the few days of steroid treatment. In most patients, this elevation is not a problem and so needs no monitoring or treatment. However, in patients with diabetes or glucose intolerance (i.e., "pre-diabetes"), additional monitoring and treatment may be indicated. These patients should discuss how to monitor and treat increases in glucose with their primary care provider, which may include oral medications or a 'sliding scale' for insulin. If you have any concerns about your glucose (sugar) level, contact your primary care provider, or if necessary seek treatment at an emergency room.

Call your Mellen Center health care provider if you have any significant side effects from this medication.

**Pulse Steroids**

In some patients with MS the neurologist may suggest pulse steroids. At the Mellen Center, we usually do this by giving IV methylprednisolone daily for three days every 2 to 3 months, sometimes with a taper after each course of steroids. In some patients, adding this to standard disease modifying agents may help improve the response to medications. In other patients, we will sometimes use this treatment alone. We call the treatment ‘pulse steroids’ because they are intermittent, something like a ‘pulse.’ We evaluate pulse steroids after two or three treatment cycles and decide with you whether to continue the treatments.

**Does insurance cover this treatment?**

Insurance coverage for this treatment varies greatly, depending on individual insurance plans. Intravenous methylprednisolone is usually covered. If you want to check with your insurance company before receiving treatment, you will need to let them know the following CPT (procedure) codes:

- J2930: Methylprednisolone (Solu-Medrol)
- 99211: Established patient; level 1
- 90780: Infusion therapy
- 90781: Infusion therapy, additional

You can also contact the Mellen Center’s financial counselor at 216.444.8100 or 1.800.223.2273, ext. 48100, for questions about your insurance coverage.

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