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The non-conventional effects of Glucocorticoids in cancer

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Synthetic corticosteroids are widely used for the treatment of a variety of diseases, including pre-malignant and malignant conditions. In striking contrast, recent evidence suggests that corticosteroids can bear tumor-promoting effects in solid tumors of epithelial origin. We have recently shown that epithelial tissues, including the mucosa of the oral cavity and the skin, are able to modulate the local concentration of active corticosteroids and to produce new steroids. This has important clinical and pathophysiological implications because tissue-specific regulation of glucocorticoids plays a key role in the overall effect of these molecules. In the present review of the current English literature, performed using MEDLINE/PubMed/Ovid databases, we collected published evidence to demonstrate that corticosteroids induce effects that are more complex and controversial than previously acknowledged. Published studies clearly demonstrate that this class of molecules influences pathophysiological processes that are strictly related to malignancy, providing the rationale for further investigation.

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