# CORTICOSTEROID THERAPY

A drug therapy now exists for pregnant women that can significantly reduce many of the complications that are common for babies born prematurely. Pregnant women at risk for Preterm Delivery between 24 and 34 weeks gestation (with a few exceptions) are candidates for this treatment. Babies born before the 34th week are at increased risk of Respiratory Distress Syndrome (RDS) and Intraventricular Hemorrhage (IVH), and Corticosteroid therapy can prevent or lessen the severity of these complications.

Other clinical conditions which are benefited from Corticosteroid therapy are:

- Preterm labor
- Premature Rupture of Membranes (PROM)
- Pre-eclampsia (Toxemia)
- Problems that can lead to delivery of a preterm infant, such as: diabetes, Third Trimester Bleeding, and some types of Fetal Distress.

Most infants do not have mature lungs until 36 weeks gestation. About 50% of babies born at 30 weeks develop RDS. At least half of all infants treated with Corticosteroid therapy do seem to respond well to treatment. The effects of Corticosteroid therapy on the baby's lungs are:

- Increases the area of the lungs that can move oxygen into the blood
- Decreases the incidence of RDS by 50% for babies less than 31 weeks gestation
- Decreases the overall neonatal mortality by 50%
- Decreases the incidence of some other serious complications of preterm birth (IVH and premature bowel problems)

Celestone Soluspan is the preferred medication for Corticosteroid therapy, due to its longer duration of action and weak suppression of the immune system. Treatment consists of two 12.5 mg doses, given by injection 24 hours apart. Studies suggest that the beneficial effects of the medication last up to seven days following treatment.

Because the costs of caring for infants with RDS, and other complications of preterm birth are so high, interventions that can reduce the effects of these problems for families, such as Corticosteroid therapy, have the potential of producing large cost savings, in addition to improving health.