



Prednisone

("PRED ni sone")

How this drug is given: By mouth

Purpose: This drug is an anti-inflammatory drug from the class of steroids called glucocorticoids. They are frequently used to help with the body's response to chemotherapy. Glucocorticoids should not be confused with anabolic steroids that athletes sometimes use to build muscle.

How to take this drug

- Prednisone should be taken *exactly* as prescribed. You should never change your dose of prednisone or stop taking this medicine suddenly unless instructed by your doctor.
- If your supply of prednisone is running low, tell your doctor before your prescription runs out.
- Take each dose with food or milk to prevent an upset stomach.
- Take your doses early in the day to prevent trouble sleeping.

Storage

- Store this medicine at room temperature, away from heat and moisture. Keep this medicine in its original container, out of the reach of children and pets.
- If you have unused oral chemotherapy pills (tablets or capsules), please return them to the pharmacy where the prescription was filled. Do not flush down the toilet, dump in the sink, or throw away in the trash.

Things that may occur during treatment

1. Stomach irritation can occur, possibly leading to stomach ulcers. To prevent this, take each dose with food, milk or an antacid.
2. Stomach burning/pain or bloody/black bowel movements should be reported to your doctor or nurse right away.
3. You may be at an increased risk of developing an infection. It is very **important** to report any signs of infection, such as a sore throat, a cough, pain, burning with urination, or skin sores. A fever may not always be present.

4. Fluid retention in the body can lead to weight gain, swelling in the hands and feet, blurred vision, and a rise in blood pressure. **Avoid** salt (sodium) in your diet.
5. Your blood sugar can rise while you are taking prednisone. This can cause excessive thirst and frequent urination. Please report these symptoms to your nurse or doctor. Blood tests may be done to monitor your blood sugar level. If you have diabetes, your blood and urine may be checked more often.
6. Mood changes, depression, nervousness, and difficulty sleeping may occur. If you have sleeping problems, ask your nurse or physician about changing the time of day prednisone is taken.
7. You may be hungrier than usual. Try to eat more fruits and vegetables. Avoid foods that are high in sugar and salt.
8. If you take prednisone over a long period of time, you may notice that your face becomes slightly more rounded. Acne may develop from hormonal changes.
9. Prednisone may delay wound healing. If you have a cut or scrape, keep the area clean and covered to prevent infection.
10. Long-term use may lead to softening of the bones (osteoporosis) or destruction of the bones (osteonecrosis), which may increase risk of fractures. Increase your intake of calcium, potassium, zinc, and vitamin C. See attached sheet for suggestions. Speak with your doctor, nurse, or dietician about replacing these important minerals.
11. Long-term use can cause damage to your eyes, which may lead to cataracts or glaucoma. If you continue taking prednisone, you will need to have your eyes checked on a regular basis.
12. While taking prednisone, you should not receive immunizations (live vaccines) without first speaking with your doctor.

The above information includes some, but not necessarily all, of the possible side effects of this medication. The side effects listed in this teaching sheet may not be the same ones you experience. Your side effects may be different depending on how often you receive treatment (your schedule) and how much you receive each time (your dosage). Side effects may also vary if you are taking other medications. Please speak with your doctor or nurse if you have questions about possible side effects you may experience. This document should not take the place of conversations with members of your health care team about your treatment and side effects you may experience during and after treatment.

If you experience any significant change in your health during or after treatment, contact a member of your health care team right away.

THIS SPACE RESERVED FOR WRITTEN COMMENTS OR NOTES FOR THE PATIENT AND FAMILY:

Healthy Snacks for an Increased Appetite

Your appetite may increase while you are on steroids. To limit weight gain, avoid high-calorie snacks. Try these suggestions.

- Munch on carrot or celery sticks and any other veggies.
- Crunchy fruits like apples may satisfy the need to snack.
- Try rice cakes or microwave popcorn, instead of high calorie snacks.
- Choose no-salt-added pretzels and crackers.
- Try fresh fruit topped with low-fat yogurt.

Withdrawal Symptoms

Your body normally produces its own steroids. When taking steroid medications, your body stops making steroids. It is important to slowly decrease your dose of steroids to allow your body to start making steroids again. Stopping your medication suddenly may result in low blood pressure or irregular heartbeats.

Your doctor will give you instructions about slowly decreasing your dose over time. This is called tapering. During this time, you may notice some effects of withdrawal:

- Soreness or aches in your muscles, joints, and bones
- Low energy level
- Cravings for particular foods, or a gradual decrease in appetite
- Stomach aches, or a change in bowel habits
- **Mood swings, or just feeling “low”**
- Low blood pressure, particularly if you have been on blood-pressure-lowering drugs

REMEMBER:

- The way you feel is temporary.
- Practice stress management techniques.
- Let your family and friends know about the side effects so that they can be supportive.
- Contact the dietician for help in planning an eating pattern that’s tailor-made for you.

To schedule a nutrition appointment, please call **617-632-3006**.

To learn more, visit www.dana-farber.org/nutrition.



Suggested Changes to Your Diet While on Steroids

No Concentrated Sweets

Purpose: To avoid binge eating, don't get started on sweet foods!

- Satisfy your sweet tooth with fresh fruits
- Eliminate regular sodas: try club soda flavored with fruit juice
- Avoid added sugar
- Avoid ice cream, cakes, cookies, muffins, and candy

Limit Salt

Purpose: To reduce fluid retention

- Do not add salt when cooking or at the table
- Choose frozen or fresh vegetables instead of canned and salted
- Cut down on processed meats (deli meats)
- Avoid pickles
- Choose **low sodium** convenience foods, less than 140 mg per serving

Increase Calcium

Purpose: To replace losses

- Choose low-fat milk and low-fat yogurt
- Choose calcium-fortified orange juice
- Eat more broccoli and dark leafy greens
- Try calcium-fortified soy milk
- Add almonds, sesame seeds, soybean nuts
- Reduce caffeine intake

Increase Vitamin C

Purpose: To replace losses

- Green and red pepper
- Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, collards
- Kiwi, strawberries, citrus, and papaya

Get More Folic Acid

Purpose: To replace losses

- Choose green, leafy vegetables, asparagus
- Try sprinkling wheat germ on your cereal
- Drink more orange juice
- Add soy nuts to your diet
- Include lentils and beans in your diet

Increase Protein

Purpose: To reduce breakdown of muscle

- Choose fish, chicken, meat, and eggs
- Eat low-fat dairy products
- Try soy food (not soy sauce)
- Choose beans
- Include unsalted nuts in your diet

Replace Saturated and Hydrogenated fats

Purpose: To reduce cholesterol and triglycerides

- Choose a non-hydrogenated spread (e.g., Smart Balance) to replace butter or margarine
- If eaten at all, limit intake of red meat to less than 3 oz daily
- Use olive oil, or canola, instead of other vegetable oils
- Snack on popcorn, unsalted pretzels, rice cakes, or salt-free crackers
- Limit egg yolks to 2 per week

Increase Potassium

Purpose: To restore losses

- Try banana, avocado, papaya, cantaloupe
- Try spinach, acorn, and butternut squash
- Eat more beans: kidney, navy, or refried
- Choose sweet potatoes, broccoli, Brussels sprouts
- Add roasted, unsalted nuts to your diet
- Choose low-fat milk and low-fat yogurt
- Try dried apricots, raisins, dates

Increase Zinc

Purpose: To replace losses

- Cooked oysters, clams, mussels, lobster, and crab
- Roasted unsalted peanuts, sunflower seeds, cashews
- Wheat germ
- Lentils
- Chicken
- Swiss, gouda, and ricotta cheese