



## Prednisone

("PRED-ni-sone")

Attached: **Healthy Snacks for an Increased Appetite**

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**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.

### 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. If you have stomach burning/pain or bloody/black bowel movements, tell your doctor or nurse right away.
2. 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.
3. You may experience fluid retention that may lead to weight gain, swelling in the hands and feet, or swelling around the eyes. You may experience blurred vision.
4. Your blood pressure may go up and you may experience headaches or dizziness. Tell your cancer care team right away. If this happens, you may be given medication to help. **Avoid salt** (sodium) in your diet.
5. Your blood sugar may rise while you are taking prednisone. This may cause excessive thirst and frequent urination. Report these symptoms to your cancer care team. Blood tests may be done to monitor your blood sugar level. If you have diabetes, your blood and urine may be checked more often. You may receive insulin. Normal blood sugar levels usually return after treatment is stopped.

6. You may notice a change in your mood. Restlessness, sleeplessness, sedation, depression, or confusion may occur. Tell your cancer care team if you experience any of these symptoms. They may recommend changing the time of day your dose is given.
7. You may be hungrier than usual. Try to eat more fruits and vegetables. Avoid foods that are high in sugar and salt. (See attached nutrition tips.)
8. If you take prednisone over a long period, 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 dietitian 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 cancer care team if you have questions about possible side effects you may experience. This document should not take the place of conversations with members of your cancer care team.*

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

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

## Healthy Snacks for an Increased Appetite *While Taking Prednisone*

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

Try these suggestions.

- Munch on carrots, celery sticks, or 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
- Stomachaches 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 an appointment with a Dana-Farber nutritionist, call 617-632-3006.

To learn more, visit [www.dana-farber.org/nutrition](http://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
- Avoid sugary soft drinks: Instead, 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 to meals 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

### 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, or Brussels sprouts
- Add roasted, unsalted nuts to your diet
- Choose low-fat milk and low-fat yogurt
- Try dried apricots, raisins, and dates

### Increase Zinc

Purpose: To replace losses

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