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Oral Prednisone

What is prednisone?

Oral prednisone is a corticosteroid medication. Corticosteroids mimic the effects of cortisone and hydrocortisone, the hormones your body produces naturally in your adrenal glands, which sit atop your kidneys. Corticosteroids help to control the stress of illness and injury, immune function and inflammation.

Prednisone is a medication that is chemically similar to your body's natural steroids. When prescribed in doses that exceed your body's usual levels, prednisone can suppress inflammation. Prednisone is not the same as the "anabolic steroids" used by athletes to build muscle. It has great potential in treating a variety of conditions, from allergic reactions to lupus to asthma, and is often used to treat sinus disease with severe swelling or edema.

What side effects can prednisone cause?

Like all medications, prednisone carries a risk of side effects. The potent effect of prednisone can result in serious side effects that mimic Cushing's disease, a malfunction of the adrenal glands that results in an overproduction of cortisol.

Within days or weeks of starting oral prednisone, you have an increased risk of:

- Nausea, vomiting or stomach upset
- Insomnia
- High blood sugar, which can trigger or worsen diabetes
- Increased blood pressure
- Mood swings or depression (at times severe)
- Increased hunger or thirst
- Fluid retention, causing swelling in your lower legs

When taking oral prednisone longer term, you may experience:

- Cataracts
- Elevated pressure in the eyes (glaucoma)
- Increased risk of infections
- Loss of calcium from bones, which can lead to osteoporosis and fractures
- Menstrual irregularities
- Suppressed adrenal gland hormone production
- Thin skin, easy bruising and slower wound healing
- Acne

Other side effects that occur only rarely, usually with high doses:

- Increased hair growth
- Avascular necrosis of the hip or shoulder joint
- Weight gain with fat deposits in your abdomen, face and the back of your neck

Some side effects can be serious. If you experience any of the following symptoms, call your provider immediately:

- Vision problems/eye pain
- Swelling of the eyes, lips, tongue, arms, hands, feet, ankles or lower legs
- Rash
- Hives
- Itching
- Seizures
- Depression or suicidal thoughts
- Loss of contact with reality
- Confusion
- Shaking of the hands that you cannot control
- Numbness or burning in the face, arms, legs, feet or hands
- Vomiting or severe heartburn
- Irregular heart
- Sudden weight gain
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- Pain in the joints or groin



How should I take prednisone?

- Take prednisone exactly as directed by your provider. Do not take more or less than is prescribed for you.
- Take each dose with a full glass of water and with food to lessen stomach upset.
- Do not take any herbal products or grapefruit juice with prednisone.
- Take your dose, if possible, before 9 a.m. to follow the body's natural cycle.
- Do not stop taking prednisone suddenly if you have been taking it for a few weeks. You may need a gradual reduction in dosages before you stop taking this medication.
- Store prednisone at room temperature and away from moisture or heat.

Precautions:

- Before taking prednisone, inform your provider of any allergies.
- Inform your provider of any bleeding problems, history of blood clots, bone loss (osteoporosis), myasthenia gravis, diabetes, eye disorders (ocular herpes infection, cataracts, glaucoma), heart problems, high blood pressure, kidney disease, mental health issues or mood disorders, tuberculosis, liver disease, stomach ulcer, ulcerative colitis or underactive thyroid.
- Avoid exposure to chicken pox or measles infection while taking this medication.
- Limit alcoholic beverages while taking this medication.
- Do not take it with grapefruit or herbal products.
- If you have diabetes, check your blood sugar frequently. Promptly report any abnormal results.
- Prednisone should only be used when clearly needed during pregnancy. There have been rare reports of harm to unborn babies when used during pregnancy.
- This drug should not be used with the following medications because very serious interactions may occur. (per Micromedex)
 - Rotavirus vaccine due to an increased risk of infection with the live virus.
 - Gatifloxacin due to an increased risk of high blood sugar.
 - Quetiapine due to decreased quetiapine blood levels.
 - Telaprevir due to increased prednisone blood levels.
 - Asparaginase due to decreased antitumor effectiveness.

There are many other drugs that may interact with prednisone. Be sure to discuss your current medications with your provider.

Weigh the risks and benefits of prednisone:

Remember that prednisone is neither as awful nor as miraculous as it has been portrayed. Although it may cause a range of side effects, prednisone may also relieve the inflammation, pain and discomfort of many diseases and conditions. Talk with your provider to make choices that minimize side effects and achieve benefits.

Please contact the office with any questions or concerns at (248) 844-2936.