

Prednisone (Cortisone)



What is it?

How does it work?



Why am I taking it?

How quickly does it work?



- Prednisone is a pill that is similar to cortisone, a natural hormone produced by your adrenal glands.
- Prednisone works by lowering or balancing out your body's immune system.
- Prednisone helps to reduce the inflammation (swelling, warmth, or pain) that develops in conditions such as Rheumatoid Arthritis, Psoriatic Arthritis, Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, vasculitis, certain eye conditions and other types of inflammatory disease.
- Prednisone has been ordered by your doctor to help treat your arthritis or other health conditions. Prednisone is taken with other medicines to help
 - reduce pain in your joints and other tissues
 - reduce how long you have stiffness in the morning
 - reduce the number of swollen & tender joints you have
 - increase ability to move your body & do daily activities
 - slow or even prevent damage to your joints or tissues
- Prednisone is often ordered by your doctor for:
 - a short period of time (1 to 3 months) while waiting for other medicines (such as DMARDS - disease modifying drugs) to start working
 - flares: worsening of your arthritis or condition
 - for a long period of time with other medicine to help control inflammation (swelling, warmth, stiffness or pain)
- Most people find their symptoms (swelling, stiffness, or pain) start to feel better within 1 to 2 days after taking the first dose of prednisone.

How do I take it?

- Prednisone comes in 1, 5 & 50 mg tablets
- The amount of prednisone that the doctor orders for you may vary from 1 mg up to 100 mg in a day depending on how severe your condition is.
- Prednisone is usually taken 1 or 2 times in a day.
- Prednisone is taken with breakfast to act like how your body produces cortisone throughout the day.

Take the prednisone as advised by your doctor.

- Work with your doctor to decide how much prednisone you need. Taking more prednisone than is needed may cause side effects. Skipping doses of prednisone will reduce how well it is working in your body to control your condition.

Do not stop taking prednisone without asking your doctor.

- Prednisone needs to be reduced slowly over time to prevent side effects such as feelings of weakness and tiredness.



What if I forget to take it?



- If you forget to take prednisone, take it as soon as you remember, unless it is nearly time for your next dose. Do not double up your medicine.
- If you are taking prednisone every other day and forgot to take the dose yesterday, take it today and then again in 2 days.

What tests are needed?



Lab tests:

- No regular blood tests are needed while taking Prednisone.
- Your doctor will order specific blood tests to follow how well your condition is doing.

What are the possible side effects?

The following side effects may occur when taking prednisone for even a short period of time and will go away as the prednisone is reduced or stopped.



- mood changes, sometimes feeling full of energy and having difficulty sleeping, or feeling depressed or irritable
- upset stomach, nausea or indigestion. Take prednisone with food to avoid an upset stomach.
- increased appetite
- weight gain from increased appetite or fluid retention





- fluid retention causing swelling of the face, upper part of back & ankles. Do not add salt to your food.
- increased blood pressure, so have it checked every month
- blurry vision
- lower resistance to fighting infections
- changes in the menstrual cycle
- a rise in blood sugar levels, and an increased risk of diabetes (watch for increased thirst, trips to the bathroom to urinate)



When prednisone is used for a long time other side effects that can occur are:



- skin changes such as acne, hair growth, easy bruising or wounds take longer to heal
- the eyes can develop cataracts or glaucoma
- thinning of the bones (osteoporosis) can occur due to a loss of calcium from the bones which may cause a fracture if you fall. To have healthy bones and prevent bone loss, take elemental calcium 1500 mg & vitamin D 1,000 IU from food and supplements every day.
- weakness of the hip and shoulder muscles and damage to bones (especially in the hip) can occur rarely



What if I have a side effect?



Call your doctor or nurse if you develop any symptoms.

- These symptoms can occur any time while taking prednisone and often don't last long. If these symptoms are because of how much prednisone you are taking, the prednisone may need to be reduced or stopped.

What if I get sick?



Inform all your health care providers (doctors, nurses, pharmacists & dentists) that you are taking prednisone.

- You may need to take extra prednisone when you are sick or if you have a major infection.

What if I need surgery?



Develop a plan with your doctor (rheumatologist)

- about changes to your medicines & herbal supplements when having surgery, dental work or other procedures
- Prednisone can safely be taken during surgery.
- Your body may need extra prednisone during this time.

Are there any precautions?

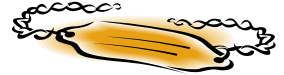


Allergy:

You should not take prednisone if you have had a previous serious allergic reaction (rash, itching etc) to prednisone.

Wear a medic alert bracelet:

- if taking prednisone for more than 3 months in case you are ever in an accident.
- www.medicalert.ca or 1-800-668-1507



Pregnancy:

- Before taking prednisone, tell your doctor if you are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or are breast-feeding.
- Prednisone has been used safely to treat arthritis & other conditions during pregnancy.



Vaccines:

- It is safe to have a flu or pneumovax vaccine.
- Do not take live vaccines when taking prednisone.



How do I store it?



- Keep the tablets in their original container.
- Store prednisone at room temperature, away from heat, moisture and direct light.

How often will I see my doctor?



1. **See your rheumatologist every 1 to 3 months after starting prednisone.** These visits allow you & your doctor to decide how well the prednisone is working to help your condition, & if any changes to your medicine are needed.

2. **Keep a diary and a medicine list in your wallet.**

Record all medications, vitamin/mineral & herbal supplements you are taking & any allergies you may have. Record when you take your medicine, any side effects and reasons for changes or stopping of medicine. Bring these with you to all appointments with your health care providers.



What if I take a trip?



- Always take extra medicine & a prescription in a purse or bag you are carrying. Bring a travel letter from your doctor.

Disclaimer:

This information does not replace medical advice. Specific questions about medications should be discussed with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

