

Prednisone

The good, the bad, and the ugly—a guide to side effects

What is prednisone?

Prednisone (PRED-ni-son) is a steroid drug that decreases inflammation. It is used to treat many different types of kidney disease. Your doctors will decide how much prednisone you take and how often, based on many important factors.

Prednisone has a lot of good effects. It also has some common, unpleasant side effects to your body and mind (emotions). This information covers some of the physical and emotional side effects you may have while taking prednisone.

What will the side effects be like?

The side effects of prednisone vary from person to person. The longer you are taking prednisone, the more often you take prednisone and the bigger the dose impacts which side effects you may have. Your doctor will be watching you carefully for side effects.

When will it get better?

Remember most side effects of prednisone will decrease as you take less or taper off and stop taking the medicine. Some of the side effects of prednisone may not happen at all if you take it every other day instead of every day. Your doctor will make the decision about how much you need.

It is very important to follow your doctor's instructions when you take your prednisone. You should never stop taking prednisone suddenly as this can harm your body.

Prednisone must be reduced (tapered) slowly, so that your body can gradually take over making it on its own again.

Physical side effects of taking prednisone can include:

- More risk for infection
- High blood pressure
- Increases in blood sugar
- Keeping too much fluid and salt in your body
- Increased hunger and weight gain
- Muscle pain and weakness
- Rounding or filling out of the face
- Bone thinning
- Upset stomach
- Skin changes; color, thinning, acne
- Slower growth and delayed puberty
- Cataracts



More risk for infection

It is harder for your body to fight infection when taking prednisone. As a result, it is easier to catch things when other people are sick.

Some infections can be very serious. It is important to avoid exposure to chicken pox. If exposed to chicken pox, it is important to let your doctor know immediately.

Good handwashing is also very important to prevent infection. Everyone in the family needs to wash their hands well.

Let your doctor know if you have a fever, cough or cold symptoms, or other illness.



High blood pressure

Many people who take prednisone, especially with cyclosporine or tacrolimus, can have high blood pressure. Your blood pressure will be checked while you are taking prednisone and your doctor may give you medicine to lower your blood pressure (for example, a medicine called amlodipine). Eating foods with less salt will help. Please ask your dietitian for help choosing foods that are best for you. Gentle exercise, relaxation and rest also help.

Increases in blood sugar

Taking prednisone can make the sugar (glucose) in your blood high. Signs that your sugar levels are high include:

- Feeling more thirsty than usual
- Passing urine (peeing) more often
- Blurry vision
- Feeling dizzy or tired

We will check your blood sugar with your other lab tests. Some people need to use insulin, a medicine that helps lower blood sugar and check their blood sugar more often.

If you have high blood sugar, you may need to avoid foods that have lots of sugar like candy and soda. Your dietitian will help you choose which foods are right for you.

Keeping too much fluid and salt in your body

Prednisone can make your face, legs and ankles look swollen or puffy. This is caused by your body holding on to extra water and sodium (salt). It will help if you avoid foods that are high in salt and not add salt to your food. Your dietitian will help you choose foods that are low in salt, as well as help you decide how much fluid you need to drink.

Increased hunger and weight gain

You may feel more hungry than usual while on prednisone. You may want foods at unusual times of the day and night. Try to eat healthy foods and snacks, avoid foods that are high in salt and sugar and try to exercise gently each day. Your dietitian can help you choose which foods are best for you.

Most people who take prednisone gain weight. Some may develop a fatty area below the back of the neck called a “buffalo hump.” These changes are normal and will go away as you take less prednisone.

Muscle pain and weakness

Your arms and legs may ache when you have been taking prednisone for a while. Walking, gentle exercise and rest will help. You may see a physical therapist who can show you how to stretch and exercise without hurting yourself. Your doctor may also give you medicine to help the pain.



Emotional side effects of taking prednisone can include:

- Trouble with sleeping
- Mood swings
- Confusion
- Anxiety/panic
- Euphoria (great happiness)
- Depression/withdrawal



Trouble with sleeping

You may have problems sleeping while taking prednisone. It can make you feel “wired” like you drank too much caffeine. You might find it hard to sleep at night or wake up several times in the night. Sometimes changing the times you take your prednisone can help; **always** talk with your nurse or doctor before making any changes to your medicines. Rest is important. Even just relaxing with soft music and being still and quiet, even if not sleeping, can help with being tired. Your doctor may also give you medicine to help you sleep.

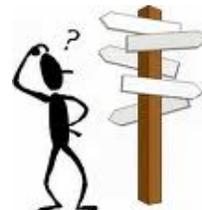
Mood swings

Mood swings can be sudden and extreme! You may feel very happy one minute, and very sad the next and not know why. You may become angry and feel frustrated more easily than before.

It is important to talk about your feelings with someone you trust and feel comfortable with. Remember that many people who take prednisone feel like this.

Confusion

You may feel unable to pay attention. This can affect reading and schoolwork, or even just talking and answering questions. You may feel mixed up or confused about things. Having a regular daily routine and writing down the things you need to do and remember can be very helpful.



Anxiety/Panic

Signs of anxiety include restlessness, a lot of worrying about things that probably will not happen, and not being able to pay attention or remain focused on a task. Sometimes the stress can get extreme and lead to panic attacks. Panic attacks are short times of intense fear and anxiety, which often include quick heartbeats, shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness or stomach problems.

Please talk with your doctor if you are having any of these signs. Some things that may help lower your stress are:

- Getting enough rest (at least 8 hours a day)
- Meditation (sitting quietly with your thoughts)
- Talking about your feelings with someone you trust
- Listening to gentle music
- Reading
- Massage
- Taking a warm bath
- Going for walks
- Regular exercise that you are used to doing

Euphoria (You-for-ee-a)

Euphoria is a feeling of great happiness and excitement (like how you might feel if you won the lottery). Some people have euphoria one minute then feelings of sadness the next minute. This feeling may affect sleep and the ability to rest well. It is important not to get too tired, take breaks and rest often, and pay attention to what you are feeling from day to day. Keeping a journal, and reading back over good and bad days may help. If you are feeling so euphoric that you are unable to rest well, please talk with your doctor or nurse.

Depression/Withdrawal

Dealing with a serious illness causes a roller coaster of feelings. You may have feelings of helplessness and sadness. Depression can make you feel empty, hopeless, negative, or restless. You may lose interest in hobbies or interests, feel unable to focus or concentrate, have trouble sleeping, or sleep much more than usual, lose your appetite or overeat.

Prednisone can also cause signs of depression. Talking about your feelings with someone who listens (parents, friends, child life, social worker, nurse, doctor, volunteer, psychologist), or sharing your experiences with someone who has kidney disease can really help.

If you are having these feelings, or thoughts about hurting yourself please talk with your nurse or doctor at once. It is important to get professional help when needed. Counseling and/or medicine may help manage your depression.

This educational handout has been adapted with permission from Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, October 2010.