



# Prednisone

*To treat pulmonary fibrosis*

This handout explains prednisone, a steroid medicine used to reduce inflammation.

## What is prednisone?

Prednisone is a *steroid* medicine. Steroids are *immunosuppressants*, which make the immune system less active. The result is less inflammation.

## How should I take it?

Prednisone can be prescribed in different ways. You may start at a lower dose to maintain and preserve your lung function. Or, you may start at a higher dose and then lower the dose over time until you reach a maintenance dose.

The average dose is between 5 mg and 10 mg, taken once a day. Your dose may be higher or lower, depending on your particular condition and overall health. Sometimes your dose will change for a short time. This is normal as your symptoms get worse or better.

It is best to take prednisone in the mornings so that it does not affect your regular sleeping habits. The closer to bedtime you take it, the greater the chance you will have trouble sleeping.

Once you are on prednisone for longer than 2 weeks, it is very important never to stop taking it suddenly. When you take prednisone for 2 weeks or longer, your body stops making its own steroids. It depends on the prednisone you take by mouth for the steroids it needs. If you need to stop taking prednisone, you must lower your dose slowly. How long it takes to get off of it completely will depend on the dose you were taking.

If you miss a dose, do **not** double your next dose to “make up” for the missed dose. Just take your next dose at the regularly scheduled time.

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## **Special Precautions**

Before you start taking prednisone, tell your doctor if you:

- Are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding
- Are on blood thinners, such as warfarin (Coumadin) or aspirin
- Have an active infection, especially if you:
  - Have an active herpes eye infection
  - Recently had tuberculosis (TB)
  - Tested positive for TB, even if you did not have an active infection
  - Recently had measles, chickenpox, or shingles

### ***Caution with Vaccines***

Before you start taking prednisone, make sure your vaccines are up to date. You may still get vaccinated while taking prednisone, but they may not work as well since your immune system is not as active.

Talk with your doctor before getting any **live virus** vaccines. Getting your influenza vaccine (flu shot) every year is still advised.

## **What are the side effects?**

Prednisone has many benefits, but it also has many side effects. Some side effects last only a short time if you are on a higher dose, but others can occur with any dose. Side effects may last even after you stop taking prednisone.

### ***Greater Risk of Infection***

Prednisone weakens your immune system and makes you unable to fight off infections. You are more likely to get viruses (such as cold or flu), and infections from bacteria (such as pneumonia), fungal infections (such as thrush), and protozoa (such as malaria).

Call your doctor if you are sick and:

- You have a high fever.
- Your illness lasts longer than usual.
- Your symptoms are different than they usually are when you are sick.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

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### *Risk of Diabetes*

Prednisone causes your body to produce more sugar, and it also reduces your body's ability to properly handle this extra sugar. Insulin, which helps the body use sugar for energy, is not effective, and the sugar in your blood increases. This increase in blood sugar can result in diabetes. This may be corrected by lowering your prednisone dose, but sometimes people develop diabetes even if prednisone is stopped.

### *Vision Problems*

Prednisone may affect your vision after you have taken it for a while. Cataracts are the most common side effect, but glaucoma can also occur. Get your eyes checked regularly if you are on prednisone for a long time.

### *Weakened Bones*

Over time, prednisone can weaken your bones and make them more likely to break. You can help keep your bones strong by getting regular exercise and taking recommended amounts of calcium and vitamin D. You may also need other medicines to increase the strength of your bones.

### *Mood Changes*

Prednisone can affect your mood. The higher the dose, the more likely you are to have mood changes. And, these changes may be more intense than normal. You may feel happy, sad, angry, or nervous. If you were already having any of these feelings, they may get more intense while you are taking prednisone.

### *Sleep Problems*

You may have trouble sleeping while you are taking prednisone, even if you feel tired. This is more common with higher doses of prednisone, but can happen at any dose. You may also have vivid dreams. If these bother you, talk with your doctor.

### *Skin Changes*

Prednisone may make your skin feel thinner, and you may bruise more easily and not heal as quickly. You may also have more acne or hair growth. These symptoms can improve by reducing your prednisone dose. Talk with your doctor if you have these symptoms and they are bothering you.

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