

Prednisone

Prednisone is a man-made steroid that resembles the natural corticosteroid produced by the adrenal glands. It is used in the treatment of many different illnesses. The brand most frequently dispensed is Deltasone. ® The generic name is prednisone.

Prednisone works in myasthenia gravis (MG) by changing the normal action of the body's immune system. This changed action limits the production of antibodies that may lead to improved muscle strength. Prednisone also acts as an anti-inflammatory as it does in the treatment of other illnesses.

It is recommended that prednisone be taken:

- All at one time
- In the morning
- With milk or food

Taking the medication all at one time in the morning most resembles the body's natural release of the corticosteroid from the adrenal glands. If prednisone causes an upset stomach, take it with milk or food.

When prednisone is first prescribed for MG it may cause increased muscle weakness. Therefore, admission to the hospital before starting prednisone may be advised.

Possible Side Effects

- Mood changes—euphoria, nervousness, depression
- Difficulty sleeping
- High blood pressure
- Fluid retention
- Cataracts
- Glaucoma
- Stomach ulcer
- Increased appetite
- Slow wound-healing
- Acne
- Thinning of the skin
- Muscle weakness, especially in the thighs
- Osteoporosis
- Lowered resistance to infection
- High blood sugar
- Increase of darkening of hair growth
- Deterioration of joints

Close supervision by the neurologist is required while taking the medication. Additional specialists may be needed to follow and to treat specific side effects. Some side effects will decrease as the medicine is reduced and disappear when it is stopped. Other side effects are permanent and need to be treated by a physician.

Strength Improvement

Prednisone may be started at a low dose and increased or it may be started at a high dose and slowly decreased. Either way, muscle strength should eventually improve. Once increased muscle strength is

achieved and maintained, a tapering or reduction of the medication under the physician's supervision may be started.

To maintain strength, reduction should be done on a very slow schedule, usually over one year or more. Reduction is continued until muscle strength is maintained at the lowest possible dose. This dose is known as the maintenance dose.

Dosage

In alternate of every-other-day therapy, there is an "on" day and an "off" day. Prednisone is taken on the "on" day and not taken on the "off" day. It may be helpful to decide at the beginning of the month to take the medicine on the even days or odd days of that particular month. Marking these days on a calendar will help to prevent missed doses.

If a dose is missed in the morning, take it as soon as possible. When on a daily dose schedule and the previous day's dose was totally missed, skip the dose. **The dose should never be doubled.** If on every-other-day therapy and yesterday's "on" dose was missed, take the dose immediately. That day then becomes the "on" day and the following day becomes an "off" day. Remember to change the "on/off" markings on your calendar.

Prednisone treatment may change from an "on" day "off" day schedule to a "high" day "low" day schedule. In this situation, a larger dose of prednisone is taken on the "high" day and a lesser amount is ordered for the "low" day.

Please note — you may also have less muscle strength on "off" days. In some cases, Prednisone therapy, at a maintenance level, is taken every day.

Conclusion

The choice to start prednisone is a long-term commitment. This medication cannot be stopped suddenly. A sudden stop could lead to adrenal failure and death.

All changes in prednisone dose or schedule must be made by the physician.

Tips to Remember

- Notify all physicians, dentists, nurses and pharmacists that you are taking the drug.
- Talk with the neurologist before becoming pregnant.
- Check with the neurologist before taking any vaccination.
- Check with the neurologist before taking aspirin or products containing aspirin. Aspirin may irritate the stomach and intestines and even cause bleeding.
- Check with the physician before taking any calcium, vitamin D or prescription medication to prevent/treat osteoporosis.
- Know the dosage of the tablets so proper dosage is taken, especially during tapering periods.
- Notify the neurologist of any illnesses or decreased muscle strength during the tapering periods.
- Follow a low-sodium (salt) diet.
- Check with the neurologist or pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medication.
- Carry a list of all medication and dosages at all times
- Blood tests, such as fasting blood sugars or potassium levels may be ordered.
- The immune system is weakened—it is easier to catch a cold, the flu, or infections.
- Avoid changing a stool-soiled diaper of an infant who has received the oral polio vaccine for 6-8 weeks following the child's vaccination.
- Wear a Medic Alert bracelet/necklace.
- On vacation, carry a prescription in case medicine is lost or stolen.
- If traveling, carry medicine in two separate areas in case one is stolen or lost. It may not be possible to have a prescription filled in some places.