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PREDNISOLONE

Medication Information

Produced by: K Mutch
Reviewed: April 2015
Review Date: April 2017

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This information leaflet is designed to answer common questions patients ask about Prednisolone. Further information can be found in the information leaflet supplied by the manufacturer or from your specialist nurse, doctor or pharmacist.

What are steroids?

Steroids (cortisone or corticosteroids) are hormones that occur naturally in the body. Steroids suppress the body's immune system by blocking a chemical called histamine (released during an allergic reaction), decrease swelling and inflammation. Steroids used to treat disease are man-made corticosteroids and are different to anabolic steroids sometimes used in sports. Prednisolone is the most common steroid tablet. Oral steroids are used to treat a large number of conditions such as autoimmune disease e.g. NMO, joint and muscle disease, allergies and asthma.

How long do they take to work?

Prednisolone works quickly, usually within a few days.

What dose do I take?

Prednisolone is available in 1mg and 5mg tablets either as a plain or enteric coated tablet. Prednisolone is usually taken in the morning with food. Often you will start on a high dose e.g. 40-60mg and then slowly reduce to a lower daily dose. You may stay on a small (maintenance) dose indefinitely as relapses may return if the steroids are stopped.

What happens if I need an operation?

Let the doctor or nurse know so they can advise you what to do about your Prednisolone therapy. If you do need an operation, you may need to increase the dose of Prednisolone for a short time. This is because the body requires more steroids during physical stress.

Is Prednisolone OK in pregnancy and breastfeeding?

Although it is best not to take Prednisolone during pregnancy, it is safer than many drugs and the benefit of treatment with Prednisolone may outweigh the risks.

Please discuss with your doctor.

Prednisolone appears in small amounts in breast milk but maternal doses of up to 40mg daily are unlikely to cause systemic effects in the infant.

3 Important things to remember whilst taking steroids

- ◆ Always carry your steroid card.
- ◆ Never stop steroids abruptly or alter your dose without discussing with your doctor first.
- ◆ If you have any other illness (like an infection) while you are taking steroid tablets; the dose may have to be increased.

Can I take other medicines along with Prednisolone?

Prednisolone may be prescribed along with other drugs in treating your condition. You should not take anti-inflammatory painkillers e.g. ibuprofen or nurofen, as together they may increase the risk of a stomach ulcer developing.

Do not take over-the-counter preparations or herbal remedies without discussing this first with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Do I need any special checks while on Prednisolone?

Your doctor may check your general condition such as weight, blood pressure and sugar level. You may have a bone density scan

You should let your dentist know you are on steroids if you are having any dental treatment and your pharmacist when collecting any prescriptions for you.

Alcohol

It is safe to drink alcohol in moderation whilst on Prednisolone, but it may aggravate indigestion.

Vaccinations

It is recommended that you should not be immunised with 'live' vaccines such as yellow fever. Pneumovax and yearly flu vaccines are safe and recommended.

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Do not stop taking Prednisolone suddenly if you have been taking them for more than three weeks. It can be dangerous to stop steroids suddenly. Your body normally makes steroid chemicals, when you take Prednisolone your body may reduce or stop making its own steroid chemicals. If you stop taking Prednisolone, your body does not have any steroids. This can cause withdrawal symptoms such as; weakness, tiredness, feeling sick, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, low blood sugar, and low blood pressure which can cause dizziness, fainting or collapse. These side effects can be serious or even life-threatening. If the dose is reduced gradually, the body gradually resumes its natural production of steroids and the symptoms do not occur.

When taking steroid tablets you should carry a steroid card which records how much Prednisolone you are on and for how long you have been taking it. If you become unwell or are involved in an accident you will probably require extra steroids.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

If you miss one dose take the usual dose when it is next due.

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What are the possible side effects?

The longer you are taking prednisolone and the higher the dose, the more likely you are to have problems. The most common side effects are;

- **Weight gain;** you may also develop puffiness around the face.
- **An increased risk of duodenal and stomach ulcers;** you are usually prescribed medication (Lansoprazole, Omeprazole) to reduce these effects. Tell your doctor if you develop indigestion or abdominal (stomach) pains.
- **Osteoporosis;** (thinning of the bones) you are usually prescribed a medicine called Alendronic acid and calcium supplements, to help prevent bone loss. Make sure your calcium intake is at least 1500mg per day. Vitamin D supplements may also help. If possible do at least 30minutes of weight bearing exercise each day.
- **Increased chance of infections;** as steroids suppress the immune system you are more likely to develop infections. Signs of infection can be disguised by prednisolone. If you come into contact with, or develop chicken pox or shingles you should report to your doctor as soon as possible as you may need anti-viral treatment.

- **Skin problems;** such as acne, stretch marks. Poor healing after injuries, thinning skin, and easy bruising.
- **Increased blood pressure;** have your blood pressure checked regularly, it can be treated if it becomes high.
- **High blood sugar;** (diabetes), your doctor may arrange a yearly blood sugar test to check for diabetes, in particular, if you have a family history of diabetes.
- **Mood and behavioural changes;** some people actually feel better in themselves when taking steroids. However, steroids may aggravate mental health problems such as depression, confusion or irritability, some people may develop delusions or suicidal thoughts. Seek medical advice if any worrying mood or behavioural changes occur.
- **Eye problems;** steroids may exacerbate glaucoma, papilloedema or cataracts.

These side-effects may affect **some** people who take steroids. **There is often a balance between the risk of side-effects against the symptoms and damage that may result if not treated.**