

Prednisolone for inflammatory conditions

The leaflet is about taking prednisolone to treat inflammatory conditions. If you have any questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your child.

About prednisolone

Prednisolone is a medicine. It's a type of steroid that's used to treat inflammatory conditions. It's very similar to the steroid the body produces naturally during times of stress, infection or inflammation. These steroids are different to the anabolic steroids used for body building.

Steroids are the standard treatment for many medical conditions. In the Department of Rheumatology at Evelina London (RhEve), we use prednisolone to treat inflammatory conditions such as:

- juvenile idiopathic arthritis
- lupus
- dermatomyositis
- vasculitis
- uveitis

Why your child has been prescribed prednisolone

Prednisolone is a very effective medicine. It can be used to:

- reduce joint swelling, pain and stiffness
- reduce rashes and fevers
- improve your mood when unwell
- improve daily activities such as walking, running, handwriting

It is mainly used to control inflammation while waiting for long-term medicines, such as methotrexate or azathioprine, to take effect.

Taking prednisolone

Prednisolone is normally taken one time every day, in the morning. Your child should take it with, or just after food to help prevent stomach (tummy) upsets. It's available from the pharmacy at Evelina London as tablets.

If your child is unable to swallow tablets they can be crushed and diluted in water. Or, the tablets can be crushed and mixed with a small amount of soft food, such as a spoonful of yogurt or jam. Elsewhere, prednisolone may be available as a soluble preparation.

The dose (amount) and length of time your child is prescribed prednisolone will depend on:

- their weight
- how severe their inflammation is
- how effective other medicines have been

Prednisolone will either be prescribed as a very short course (3 to 7 days), or longer term. When it is used for more than 7 days the dose will gradually be reduced over days, weeks or months. You will be given clear instructions on how to do this.

When steroids are taken longer-term, the body reduces the amount of steroid that it produces. Steroid treatment should never be stopped suddenly, as the body needs time to start producing more of its own steroids again. Stopping steroids suddenly can cause low blood pressure, feeling very unwell, or a severe flare-up of your child's condition.

If a dose is missed

If a dose is missed give it as soon as you remember. If you do not remember it until the next day, give **only** that day's dose. Never give a double dose.

If your child is sick

If your child is sick (vomits) within 30 minutes of taking a dose of prednisolone, you should give them another dose. If you're unsure what to do, call the RhEve helpline for advice.

Side effects

Your child has been prescribed prednisolone because the benefits are considered to outweigh any possible side effects.

We try to use the smallest possible dose for the shortest amount of time, as this is less likely to cause side effects. Please contact us if you have any concerns about steroids or their side effects. Do not stop your child's treatment without speaking to the RhEve team.

Common side effects

Prednisolone can cause irritation to the lining of the stomach. Taking it with food will help. Please let your child's GP know if this happens, as there are medicines that they can prescribe to help with stomach irritation.

Steroids can affect sleep, so it's best to take them in the morning.

Your child might have an increased appetite (feel hungrier) and gain weight while taking prednisolone. This is more likely to happen if your child is taking a higher dose, for longer amounts of time. Keeping a well-balanced diet will help, and the RheVe team can provide support with this.

Less common side effects

Other side effects that can happen with long-term use, or with high doses of prednisolone include:

- an increased chance of infections (that might need to be treated with antibiotics)
- high blood pressure (medicine can be given to lower blood pressure, if we cannot reduce the dose of prednisolone)
- changes in mood or behavior

Rare side effects

If higher doses of prednisolone are taken for a long time, they can make bones thinner. If your child needs to take a high dose of prednisolone for more than 4 four weeks, they should take calcium and vitamin D supplements to help prevent this. These can be prescribed by their GP.

Other rare side effects include:

- changes to the skin, such as thinning and slower healing
- weaker muscles
- more chance of bruising

Prednisolone can also affect children's growth.

These usually settle back to normal after stopping the steroids.

Safety

A steroid treatment card should be carried with the current dose recorded on it. The pharmacist or nurse specialist can supply this card.

If your child becomes unwell or is involved in an accident it's important that **any** medical team treating them are informed, as they may need an increased dose of steroids.

- Check with your child's GP or the RhEve team before your child starts any new medicines
- Prednisolone reduces the body's ability to fight infections and may hide more obvious signs of illness, such as a high temperature (fever). If you have any concerns, see your child's GP.
- Discuss with the RhEve team if "live" vaccines such as MMR, are due. Inactive vaccines are safe to have and the flu vaccine (injectable) is recommended. However, high dose steroids may make vaccines less effective.
- If your child has contact with someone who has chickenpox, shingles or measles, let the GP or RhEve team know, as protective treatment may be required.

If your child has adrenal insufficiency and they are dependent on steroids, they should be given an Adrenal Insufficiency Card. This includes important information about extra treatment they may need if they are unwell, or if they need to have surgery. Your medical team should speak to you about this, if it applies to your child.

Storage

Remember to store medicines out of the reach of children. Information here should be read alongside patient information provided by the manufacturer.

Repeat prescriptions

Repeat prescriptions should be obtained from your child's GP.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about prednisolone, please contact us,
[email gstt.evelinaprmeds@nhs.net](mailto:gstt.evelinaprmeds@nhs.net)