

Fludrocortisone Acetate (Florinef®)

Available in 0.1mg tablets

USES OF THIS MEDICATION

- There is really only one use for this medication: the treatment of hypoadrenocorticism (Addison's disease). In this disease, the adrenal gland is unable to produce hormones called mineralocorticoids, glucocorticoids and sometimes others. In the normal animal, these hormones are responsible for the balance of sodium and potassium and without these hormones a life-threatening circulatory shock ultimately results.
- Fludrocortisone acetate is a mineralocorticoid which can be given as a tablet to animals (or people) with Addison's disease to prevent this circulatory crisis.
- It should be noted that an Addisonian crisis is an emergency and that, while fludrocortisone acetate is appropriate for prevention, it does not work fast enough in a crisis. An animal known to have Addison's disease that is also showing weakness, vomiting, diarrhea or appetite loss should have his/her sodium/potassium balance checked and should be seen by a veterinarian.

HOW THIS MEDICATION WORKS

- Fludrocortisone acetate acts on the kidney so as to conserve sodium (this preserves blood pressure) and excrete potassium. Naturally occurring mineralocorticoids act similarly.

SIDE EFFECTS

- Fludrocortisone acetate has glucocorticoid properties in addition to its mineralocorticoid properties. This means that it acts in a fashion similar to that of prednisone and similar side effects can be observed.
- More specifically:
 - Excessive thirst and urine production
 - Weight gain and excessive appetite
 - Hair loss
- Please review the separate handout on prednisone for more information on side effects of that medication.
- An overdose of fludrocortisone acetate could lead to high blood pressure, excess sodium retention and associated edema, weakness due to low potassium levels. Monitoring with periodic blood levels of sodium and potassium is crucial especially when the patient is just beginning therapy. The dose of medication will be dependent on these blood levels. A typical monitoring schedule would be electrolytes every 1 to 2 weeks until values are stable followed by values quarterly.

INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER DRUGS

- Blood potassium levels may drop dangerously low if this medication is used concurrently with a thiazide type diuretic (usually used in the treatment of oxalate bladder stones) or with the anti-fungal agent Amphotericin B.
- Unlike DOCP (another medication with similar actions), prednisone is generally not required in conjunction with fludrocortisone except during times of stress. This is because fludrocortisone acetate has adequate glucocorticoid properties on its own under ordinary circumstances but not under stressful circumstances.

CONCERNS AND CAUTIONS

- Currently, an injectable medication called DOCP (brand name Percorten®) is available. Injections are given approximately every 25 days and many experts feel that control of Addison's disease is superior with DOCP injections.
- In larger dogs, it is often true that these injections are less expensive than oral Florinef therapy. DOCP is an option to be aware of.

References:

Veterinary Information Network.