# Prednisone, Prednisolone

Prednis-tab®, Cortef®, Prelone®, Solu-Delta-Cortef® are other names for this medication.

## How Is This Medication Useful?

- Prednisone and prednisolone are glucocorticoid drugs (like the hormone cortisol or cortisone) used for many indications.
- These drugs are primarily anti-inflammatories. They affect nearly every cell in the body and can be used to suppress the immune system in diseases like lupus, to stop itching, to treat Addison's Disease, to treat certain types of cancer, to stop swelling of the brain, to treat certain kinds of anemia and many other inflammatory diseases and conditions.
- You should ask your veterinarian specifically why this medication is being used in your pet.

## Are There Conditions or Times When Its Use Might Cause More Harm Than Good?

- Prednisone and drugs like it should not be used in patients that have a fungus infection, as this will cause significant worsening of the fungal condition.
- Some kinds of mange (skin mites) are worsened with the use of prednisone and drugs like it.
- Prednisone and drugs like it should always be given with food to prevent stomach upset that is sometimes associated with oral corticosteroid therapy, when given to dogs. Cats don't seem to have this side effect very often.
- Animals with Cushing's disease are already making too much cortisol and should only receive glucocorticoid drugs when your veterinarian recommends them.
- Prednisone and other glucocorticoids may stunt the growth of developing animals when used at high doses, and should be used with extreme caution in young animals.
- Prednisone and drugs like it significantly alter the effect of other medications. You should not give it at the same time as other anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin or carprofen (Rimadyl®), firocoxib (Previcox®), meloxicam (Metacam®, Loxicam®), robenacoxib (Onsior®) or deracoxib (Deramaxx®). You should always tell your veterinarian about any other medications that you are giving your pet.
- Glucocorticoids also affect the results of many laboratory tests. You should always tell your veterinarian about any medications that you are giving your pet prior to a laboratory test of any kind.
- Prednisone must be converted to the active form of the drug, prednisolone, in the liver. If your pet has liver disease, then your veterinarian may prescribe prednisolone instead of prednisone. Dogs make this conversion more efficiently than cats do. If prednisone is not effective for your cat, your veterinarian may prefer to treat with prednisolone.
- If your pet has been on high doses of prednisone or other immunosuppressive drugs, you should not have it vaccinated without your veterinarian's advice as the vaccine may not work or some vaccines may actually give your pet the disease that you are trying to prevent.
- You should ask your veterinarian before stopping any prednisone therapy.
- Prednisone can cause pregnant animals to go into early labor, or cause abortion.
- Prednisone or prednisolone applied to the ears of cats may eventually cause the ears to get "floppy." Should you notice this on your cat after using topical prednisone, you should call your veterinarian. It is not life threatening to the cat, but may change its appearance permanently.
- If your animal has any of the above conditions, talk to your veterinarian about the potential risks of using the medication versus the benefits that it might have.

## What Side Effects Can Be Seen With Its Use?

- Animals treated with prednisone may have an increased appetite, increased thirst and an increased need to urinate. This is much more common in dogs than in cats. You should be aware that your pet may need to go out more frequently to urinate. As it is stressful to some pets to have "accidents" you should make sure that your pet can go outside or have a clean litter box when needed. Most dogs who take prednisone long term will gain weight.
- Glucocorticoid drugs may suppress your animal's immune system and may increase the risk for infection. This is much more common in dogs than in cats. If your pet shows any signs of fever (103-105F) or acts like it has a urinary tract infection (frequent/painful urination or unusually foul smelling urine) you should contact your veterinarian immediately.
- Some animals on long-term therapy with prednisone will develop Cushing's Syndrome. If your pet shows signs of dry hair coat or hair loss, fragile skin, painful/inflamed white lumps on the skin, weakness and muscle loss, darkening of the skin, or develops a potbelly, you should contact your veterinarian.
- Some animals may behave differently or even become aggressive while on prednisone. You should contact your veterinarian if this behavior change occurs or does not go away with time.
- Prednisone wills likely cause changes in your pet's insulin requirements if he/she is a diabetic. You should ask your veterinarian for instructions on how to deal with these changes if your pet is receiving insulin injections. Occasionally, glucocorticoid administration can result in a dog or cat with borderline pancreas function to become an insulin dependent diabetic. This can be temporary, or permanent.

- Owners are often very aware of side effects of cortisone-like drugs, and are concerned about their use. Fortunately, dogs tend to tolerate prednisone better than people, and cats even better than dogs. Many cats can take high doses of prednisone daily for decades without ill effect. Fortunately, side effects tend to disappear after a pet is weaned off the drug. Side effects can be kept to a minimum if it is possible to wean the prednisone down to the lowest possible every other day dose.

## How Should It Be Given?

- Prednisone and other glucocorticoid drugs should be given orally with food to reduce the chances of stomach ulcers or irritation.
- The successful outcome of your animal's treatment with this medication depends upon your commitment and ability to administer it exactly as the veterinarian has prescribed. Please do not skip doses or stop giving the medication. If you have difficulty giving doses consult your veterinarian or pharmacist who can offer administration techniques or change the dosage form to a type of medication that may be more acceptable to you and your animal.
- If you miss a dose of this medication you should give it as soon as you remember it, but if it is within a few hours of the regularly scheduled dose, wait and give it at the regular time. Do not double a dose as this can be toxic to your pet.
- Some other drugs can interact with this medication so tell your veterinarian about any drugs or foods that you currently give your animal. Do not give new foods or medications without first asking your veterinarian.
- Dogs and cats usually receive prednisone and prednisolone orally once to twice daily, at first. If once daily, it should be given in the morning when cortisol levels are normally higher. With time, dose may be decreased to every other day or even less often, as we determine the lowest effective dose. Giving prednisone less than daily tends to minimize negative side effects as much as is possible.
- Commercially available prednisone liquids are very bad tasting to cats. Your pharmacist may compound a specially flavored oral liquid of prednisone or prednisolone to increase your cat's acceptance of the medication, if given in a liquid form.
- In some cases, an injectable steroid is given to achieve fast control of a problem. Many of the long-acting injectable steroids give relief for 2-4 weeks, and shorter acting 2 days or so. There are others in between. If this is done, pred should be started at the first sign of any recurrence of the disease being treated and used at a low, maintenance dose. If your pet got a steroid injection, ask how long its effects will be present, so you know when to start oral medications.

## What Other Information Is Important About This Medication?

- Prednisone and prednisolone should be stored at room temperature in a tight, light resistant, childproof container away from all children and other household pets.

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*References:*
*Plumb's Veterinary Drug Handbook, 2015*
*Wellness Handouts*