

## Systemic (Oral) Steroids Information Sheet

Your doctor has prescribed systemic steroids to help in the treatment of your nasal or ear problems. Oral steroids, such as Prednisone (Prednisolone), or Medrol Methylprednisolone, are used to help control swelling and inflammation in the nose, ear, and throat. Many patients report improvement in nasal breathing, decreased congestion, or improvement in hearing for sudden hearing loss.

Just like any medication, oral steroids may be associated with side effects. This information sheet provides tips for taking this medication to receive maximal benefit with a minimum of unwanted side effects.

Your body naturally produces a steroid, cortisol, in a regular cycle. Cortisol is essential for daily function. When you take oral steroids, your body's natural production of steroids is decreased. Following the dosing guidelines below will help minimize some of the side effects:

- Take the medication exactly as prescribed, as a tapering dose is often recommended. Read the label carefully.
- Take the medication with food and an antacid such as: Pepcid, Zantac, Prilosec, Omeprazole, etc., to protect the stomach lining.
- If possible, take all of the pills prescribed between 6:00 AM and 8:00 AM. This is the time the body naturally secretes cortisol. This scheduling can reduce side effects. Taking a steroid at other times is allowable, but not optimal.
- Avoid excessive consumption of stimulant-like substances such as caffeine or decongestants. They may add to the increased energy level when taking steroids. You may also experience irritability, restlessness, and insomnia.
- Avoid taking oral steroids during pregnancy or while breast-feeding. Also let your doctor know if you have diabetes, hypertension, a bleeding abnormality, tuberculosis (TB), glaucoma, significant clinical depression, and/or an immune deficiency.

**Adverse Effects:** We believe it is important to inform you of potential risks as you consent to treatment. The vast majority of patients taking systemic corticosteroids (Prednisone, Medrol) do not suffer significant side effects and tolerate the medication well. If problems develop, most will remit once the course of the medication is finished.

It is not unusual to notice an increase in appetite or fluid retention during oral steroid therapy. Monitor your food intake and try to maintain a low salt diet. You may feel hyperactive during the high dosing at the beginning of treatment, and down or lethargic towards the end of treatment when taking lower doses. Rarely, bizarre or depressive thoughts can ensue. If this latter problem occurs, immediately notify your health provider.

Diabetes, high blood sugar, and lipid levels can all be elevated with use of an oral steroid. In most situations, this is a temporary elevation, and should be monitored. If diabetic, daily blood sugars should be recorded and monitored while on the medication. This should be discussed with your diabetes physician.

Cataracts, glaucoma, mood changes, stomach irritation or ulcer disease, bone thinning or loss (osteoporosis), salt and water retention, loss of potassium, and menstrual irregularities may occur or worsen with oral steroid use greater than 2 weeks. If you have a history of any of these problems, please let us know. Again, be sure to tell your healthcare provider who is treating these problems that you are taking oral corticosteroids. They may want to monitor you differently during this period.

Many side effects that are associated with steroid use are in relation to long term use. Your doctor has likely given you a short steroid taper that should be relatively safe and well tolerated.