

Treatment Information

Steroids (Prednisolone)

Steroids (glucocorticoids) occur naturally in your body and are important for a number of normal bodily functions. One of their useful properties is their very potent anti-inflammatory effect. Steroids can be synthesised and made into drugs which are used in conditions such as arthritis to reduce inflammation in the joints.

How do I take steroids (prednisolone)?

Steroids can be taken as tablets or given as injections. The prednisolone tablets come in three strengths: 1mg (white tablet), 2.5mg (brown tablet) and 5mg (red tablet). The dose of steroid that you are given will depend upon how much inflammation there is in your joints. Once the inflammation is under control, the dose will be reduced as much as possible. Prednisolone is usually taken once a day, in the morning with or after food.

How long will it take to work?

Your joints should become less painful and inflamed within a few days of starting the tablets.

What shall I do if I miss a dose?

If you miss a tablet, take your next dose at the normal time.

Are There Any Side Effects?

As with all medication some people may experience side effects. These may include:

- Indigestion
- Impaired healing of the skin
- Weight gain

If steroids are taken over many years at high doses they may cause diabetes and osteoporosis (thin bones). Women whose periods have stopped and are taking high doses of steroids should discuss this with their doctor.

What Tests Will I Have?

You will need a routine blood test (full blood count) before your clinic visit.

If you have been taking steroids for more than 6 months, you may have the thickness of your bones measured by a DEXA scan to see whether you are developing osteoporosis.

Important Information

1. Never stop taking the tablets suddenly. This is because your body stops producing its own steroids when you take steroid tablets and if you suddenly remove all steroids from your system you could become very ill. If you are going to stop the tablets you should gradually reduce the dose so that your body has time to start producing its own steroids again.

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2. If you are **ill** and are being sick so that you are unable to take your tablets, you should call your doctor who may give you a steroid injection until you feel able to take the tablets again.
3. If you are **reducing** the dose of steroid after taking it for several years, you should reduce the dose slowly by 1mg a month. If you become weak, lose your appetite or unwell whilst reducing the dose, you should immediately increase the dose again for a while and call your doctor.
4. You should carry a **blue steroid card** giving details of your dose with you at all times.
5. If you are or plan to become **pregnant**, you should discuss it with your doctor.
6. If you are **diabetic** and on insulin, prednisolone may affect your treatment so that you need a higher dose of insulin for a short period of time.
7. If you have never had **chicken pox**, you should avoid contact with chicken pox and shingles. See your doctor **urgently** if you are exposed to chicken pox and you may be given an injection to protect you.
8. Whilst taking Prednisolone you may be more likely to develop infections. If you develop a fever you should report to your GP.

Live Vaccinations - You should avoid immunisations which involve any of the live vaccines e.g polio, rubella, yellow fever, MMR and live typhoid.

Remember - Never stop taking steroids abruptly, always discuss this with your doctor first.

Always carry your steroid card with you.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions or need advice about your treatment phone the Rheumatology Advice line on

01202 442849.

www.poole.nhs.uk/our_services/rheumatology.asp

For further health-related information, please contact:

The Health Information & Resource Centre

Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Longfleet Road

Poole

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Telephone: (01202) 448003

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Rheumatology Practitioners

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We can supply this information in larger print, on audiotape, or have it translated for you. A member of staff will be happy to discuss this with you. Please call PALS on 01202 448499 or the Health Information Centre on 01202 448003 for further advice