



The University of Georgia

College of Veterinary Medicine
Oncology Service
(706) 542-3221

Client Information: prednisone

Prednisone is a steroid that is used to treat many diseases in humans and animals. Some cancer patients receive prednisone as part of their chemotherapy treatment. It is occasionally used to increase appetite or alleviate pain. Many patients will be treated with this drug for a long time, so it is important to be aware of potential side effects and drug interactions.

Concurrent drug administration

Prednisone can negatively interact with certain types of medications and can cause intestinal upset and ulceration. **Please DO NOT give your pet any type of arthritis or pain medication** (non-steroidal medications including aspirin, Piroxicam (feldene), Rimadyl (carprofen), Etogesic (etodolac), Tylenol (acetaminophen), and others) **without talking to your doctor first**. These medications should never be given concurrently.

If your pet has recently been taken off of their usual arthritis medication and now seems more painful, please ask your oncologist for help. Other types of medications may be very helpful in this situation.

Potential side effects

Cats are generally resistant to the effects of steroids, but dogs often experience at least mild side effects.

1. Increased thirst and urination

Most **dogs** will need to drink and urinate more while they are receiving prednisone. Please make sure your pet has access to water at all times; it can be dangerous to withhold water. Most of the time, this side effect will improve with a decrease in the dose of prednisone. If you feel that your pet develops an unacceptable level of drinking and urination, please discuss this with your doctor.

Cats do not normally experience increased thirst and urination secondary to prednisone administration. A rare side effect of steroid use in cats is diabetes

mellitus. If you notice any change in your cats drinking or urination habits, please discuss this with your oncologist.

2. **Panting-** Most dogs will pant more when treated with prednisone. Your dog will have decreased tolerance for high temperatures, so try to keep him/her indoors and as cool as possible during hot weather. Panting is never normal in cats, so contact a veterinarian immediately if your cat is panting for longer than 1 minute.

3. Increased appetite

Most dogs (rarely cats) will have an increased appetite when they are treated with steroids. For most patients, weight gain is an undesirable side effect of steroid administration. If your pet seems hungry all the time while on prednisone, try to split his/her normal food intake into 3-4 smaller meals. Low-calorie snacks such as air-popped popcorn, rice cakes, canned green beans, or small pieces of apple or carrot may be given if they are approved by your pet's doctor.

4. Gastrointestinal side effects

Prednisone usually does not cause stomach upset when given alone. If your pet is receiving another chemotherapy drug, intestinal upset is likely related to that drug. If you notice darker than normal stool, diarrhea, vomiting (especially if the vomit looks like coffee grounds), or loss of appetite, please contact your doctor for advice.

5. Other side effects

There are other side effects of long-term steroid administration, such as muscle wasting, hair loss, and increased susceptibility to infections. It is uncommon for cancer patients to develop these side effects, since your oncologist will most likely try to taper the prednisone to the lowest dose that will help your pet's condition.