

Food-Drug Interactions: Corticosteroids

Corticosteroids, also known as steroids, are a group of hormones used to control problems with swelling and the body's immune system. They also are involved in balancing the body's water, salt, and potassium.

When taking corticosteroids like prednisone for more than a month, you may retain water. You may also gain weight and have an increased appetite. Long-term use may also weaken your bones.

Salt (sodium) Intake

A high salt intake can increase water retention and increase loss of calcium in your urine.

To prevent "holding" water, decrease your salt (sodium) intake of the following:

- Salt and salty foods. If it tastes salty it has too much salt!
- Processed foods like frozen dinners, packaged entrees, and canned soups.
- Salted or smoked meat or fish. Avoid luncheon meats, bratwurst, and bacon.
- Try herbs and spices such as garlic or onion powder instead of garlic salt or onion salt. Use salt free spice mixes and marinades such as Mrs. Dash[®].
- Read food labels to pick the products lowest in salt.
- Catsup, pickles, relish, and sauerkraut.

Weight Change

You may feel hungrier while taking corticosteroids. If you do not want to gain weight, you may have to control the number of calories and fat you eat. Eat only at mealtimes and limit your portion sizes. If you are still hungry, fill up on raw vegetables and fresh fruits. Try eating a tossed salad with a low calorie dressing before lunch and dinner to help slow down your intake of other high calorie foods.

Preventing Bone Problems

To prevent bone weakness and fractures you will need to increase your calcium and Vitamin D intake. Steroids increase bone loss, decrease your body's ability to make bones, and decrease the amount of calcium your body can absorb. Exercise helps keep your bones strong. Get out and walk to help keep your bones and muscles in good shape.

Good Food Sources of Calcium and Vitamin D

Milk and milk products like yogurt, aged cheeses, and milkshakes are the best food sources of calcium and Vitamin D. Your doctor or dietitian may also suggest that you take extra calcium with Vitamin D or a multivitamin. This is especially important if you do not tolerate milk or dairy products. Calcium fortified orange juice can also increase your intake of calcium.

Food Sources of Vitamin D

Food	Amount	Vitamin D International Units
Cod Liver Oil	1 teaspoon	455
Salmon	3 ounces	309
Mackerel	3 ounces	296
Shitake mushrooms, dried	4	249
Tuna, canned	3 ounces	200
Sardines, canned in oil and drained	1¾ ounces	250
Quaker Nutrition for Women Instant Oatmeal	1 packet	154
Milk (whole, reduced fat or nonfat) Vitamin D fortified	8 ounces	98
Soy Milk, fortified with Vitamin D	8 ounces	100
Shiitake Mushrooms, fresh	3.5 ounces	100
Orange Juice, fortified with Vitamin D	4 ounces	50-65
Cereal, fortified	1 serving (¾-1 cup)	40-50
Egg yolk from hens fed Vitamin D	1	20
Liver, beef	3 ounces	13
Cheese, Swiss	1 ounce	12

Protein

While taking corticosteroids, you need to make sure you eat enough protein. Milk, meats, eggs, peanut butter, nuts, tofu, dried beans, or peas are high in protein. If your kidneys are working well, you should get at least 2-3 meat servings a day.

Sugar

In some patients, long-term use of corticosteroids raises blood sugar levels. If your blood sugar level is above normal, talk with your dietitian or doctor. They may suggest diet changes or insulin therapy. You may be able to improve your blood sugar levels by avoiding sugar-containing beverages and fruit juices. Avoid eating more calories than your body needs.

Potassium

You may need more potassium in your diet while taking prednisone. These are good sources of potassium:

- Bananas
- Oranges and orange juice
- Cantaloupe
- Beans (chili, kidney, refried, etc.)
- Potatoes, potato chips
- Chocolate
- Prunes
- Milk
- Tomatoes, tomato juice, V-8®
- Winter squash
- Salt substitutes

Dietary Supplements

Some dietary supplements can damage the liver, interact with your other medicines, or cause other side effects. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are taking anything in addition to your medicines. Let them know about all over-the-counter medicines and diet supplements.

Vitamin D Requirements and Supplements

- Standard vitamin supplements usually provide 400 International Units of Vitamin D. This level meets the needs of most people.
- However, during treatment with steroids, it is advised that most patients take 800 International Units of Vitamin D per day.
- Patients over 70 years old should take 1000 International Units Vitamin D per day.

Calcium Supplements

- Ask your pharmacist or dietitian/nutritionist to assist you in finding a suitable supplement.
- Calcium carbonate requires stomach acids. It should be consumed with

food at the end of the meal. Calcium carbonate should not be used if you are taking antacid medicines. Some people have increase gas, bloating or constipation with larger amounts.

- Calcium citrate can be taken between meals. Calcium citrate contains half the amount of elemental calcium as calcium carbonate. The pills will be larger to provide the same amount of calcium.
- Your body can only absorb 500-600 mg of Calcium at a time. If your doctor wants you to take 1000 mg of calcium per day, divide the dose and take 500 mg twice daily for maximum absorption.
- **Do not** use bonemeal or dolomite as a source of calcium. They may contain lead.
- Look for “USP” on the label or “United States Pharmacopoeia” which have standards that require the supplement contain less than 3 parts per million of lead. It also means the supplement has been tested and will dissolve properly in normal stomach acid.

Calcium Requirements

Children Age	Adequate Intake	While Taking Prednisone
0-6 months	210 mg	400 mg
6-12 months	270 mg	600 mg
1-3 years	500 mg	800 mg
4-8 years	800 mg	1200 mg
9-18 years	1300 mg	1500 mg

Adults Age (years)	Adequate Intake	While Taking Prednisone
19-50	1000 mg	1500 mg
51-70	1200 mg	1500 mg
>70	1200 mg	1500 mg

Who to Call

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below.

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH)
(608) 890-5500

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF)
(608) 287-2770

You can also visit our website at:
www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2024 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5332.