

“Pred” Use in Dogs and Cats

"Pred" is a term that we use for prednisone or prednisolone. These are cousin drugs that are classified as corticosteroids or "steroids." Cortisol is the naturally occurring cousin to prednisolone and prednisone. The terms corticosteroids, cortisone and "steroids" are almost interchangeable so we use them as if they were synonymous. These are NOT the same as the "steroids" that athletes use. Pred is a very powerful anti-inflammatory drug. Its effect is based on the dose used; the effect varies from what is called "physiological", i.e. mimics the body's normal amount of cortisone, to immunosuppressive, which suppresses the pet's immune system when treating immune disease and some cancers. It can be life saving to pets' with a wide variety of diseases.

Most pet owners are quite concerned about side effects from pred. This concern is generally founded in the problems that people often have who take pred. However, dogs and cats are extremely resistant to side effects from pred, especially at lower doses or short term use.

The most common side effects seen in pets are stimulation of thirst and appetite, an increase in urination, panting (in dogs) and stomach irritation or ulcers. These are dose related. They may occur at high doses, but will generally not occur at low (maintenance) doses. If they do occur, they will stop when the drug is stopped or the dose is lowered.

Pred can be used safely for when the lowest dose possible to treat the intended disease is used. Pred is usually started at a fairly high dose. When response occurs the dose is then gradually reduced until the lowest dose is found that will control the disease. When used long term, the goal is to eventually give it on an every-other-day schedule.

If your pet has been prescribed pred and you see any of the signs discussed above, see your veterinarian regarding the possibility of lowering the dose. Sometimes the disease it is being used for is worse than the side effects; other times the side effects are worse than the disease. Do NOT abruptly stop pred without consulting your veterinarian, especially if your pet has been on it for a long period of time. Serious life threatening conditions can happen when pred is stopped suddenly after being given for a long time. Only your veterinarian can make the decision of when and how to stop the pred.