



In veterinary medicine, I was shown by my 'mentor' that clients were happiest when you gave them a QUICK FIX!

Itching dog from allergies? Pull out the steroid injection. It works fast. But there are ALL the side effects that don't always get discussed.

In many situations it would have been far better to explore the underlying causes, and talk about some of the safe, holistic solutions.

One of those which is SO often overlooked is Liquorice Root Extract. It's a natural herbal extract which is considered the 'natural corticosteroid'.

I used this often for one of our last dogs with allergies, and he responded really well as it stopped him from licking.

Corticosteroids like Prednisone are one of the most commonly prescribed medications for your dog or cat, but they can have some SERIOUS side effects- there are safer, natural alternatives you should know about.

When Is Prednisone Prescribed?

Prednisone is often prescribed for a variety of conditions in both dogs and cats. Some of the common reasons include:

- Allergies: If your dog is excessively itching or has recurring ear infections, Prednisone might be suggested - it QUICKLY stops the itching, but comes with problems...
- Immune-mediated diseases: If your dog has an immune-mediated skin disease, the quick fix might be corticosteroids like Prednisone.
- Joint issues: Prednisone is often given for swelling and limping in dogs due to joint problems, especially if an autoimmune cause is suspected.
- Feline asthma: If your cat is coughing and breathing heavily, the immediate solution might be Prednisone.
- Gastrointestinal diseases: Dogs and cats with GI issues like vomiting, diarrhoea, or weight loss may be given Prednisone to suppress an overactive immune response.

When I started out in veterinary practice, it was common practice to reach for steroids like Prednisone for various conditions. While it can offer short-term relief, my experience and research tell me that the long-term risks often outweigh the benefits.

Serious Side Effects of Prednisone

Prednisone is a potent corticosteroid, and while it can offer relief, it also comes with a list of side effects, especially if used long-term.

Here are some of the common and serious issues I've seen in practice:

- Increased thirst and urination: Pets on Prednisone often drink more and urinate more, sometimes excessively. This can be frustrating and, in some cases, cause incontinence.
- Increased appetite: Prednisone stimulates your pet's appetite, and they may eat more, leading to weight gain.
- Weakened immune system: Long-term use of Prednisone suppresses the immune system, making pets more susceptible to infections.
- Muscle weakness and loss of muscle mass: This is especially concerning for dogs, as it can increase the likelihood of injuries like ACL tears.
- Delayed wound healing: Prednisone can affect the healing of wounds, leading to slow recovery times.
- Hair loss: Some pets develop generalized alopecia (hair loss) due to prolonged use.
- Behavioural changes: Some dogs may become more anxious, restless, or even aggressive while on Prednisone.
- Gastrointestinal issues: Stomach problems like ulcers, vomiting, and diarrhoea are common side effects.
- Diabetes: A significant risk, especially in cats treated for asthma. Prednisone can trigger diabetes, leading to the need for long-term insulin injections.
- Cushing's Disease: This disease, caused by an overproduction of cortisol, can be induced by long-term use of Prednisone, leading to increased thirst, urination, weight gain, and hair loss.

Long-Term Effects: A Case Study

I once treated a cat with feline asthma who was prescribed long-term Prednisone. Over time, this treatment led to the cat developing diabetes. Now, instead of controlling asthma, we were managing diabetes, which required insulin shots for life. This is a perfect example of how a medication meant to treat one condition can inadvertently lead to more severe problems. Prednisone can also cause issues like chronic pancreatitis, liver damage, and ongoing GI discomfort, which makes treatment even more complicated in the long run.

Alternatives to Prednisone: Safer Options to Consider

While Prednisone can be helpful in managing symptoms, there are safer alternatives that you should consider. Here are a few options that come with fewer side effects:

1. Topical Hydrocortisone

For itching and skin inflammation, a 1% hydrocortisone cream can be a good alternative. Applying it topically to the affected areas reduces the risk of systemic side effects. It's much safer than injecting or giving your pet oral steroids, as it targets only the area that needs treatment.

2. Antihistamines

Over-the-counter antihistamines, such as Cetirizine (brand name Zyrtec in the US and Reactine in Canada), are very effective for managing itching in dogs and cats. A typical dose is 0.5 mg per pound of body weight, once a day.

3. Liquorice Root Extract

Liquorice root is commonly used in Chinese medicine to modulate the immune system. It's great for reducing inflammation in pets with allergies or autoimmune diseases. While not as fast-acting as Prednisone, it's effective for long-term use. The standard dose is about seven drops of tincture once or twice daily for up to 14 days.

4. Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Fish oils, particularly Omega-3 fatty acids, are powerful natural anti-inflammatory agents. They can help manage allergies, asthma, and other inflammatory conditions. The recommended dose is 500 mg of omega-3s per 15-20 lbs of body weight, given once or twice daily.

5. CBD Oil

Cannabidiol (CBD) is a non-psychoactive compound that has shown promising results in reducing inflammation and modulating the immune system. A typical dose is 3 mg per 10 lbs of body weight, given twice daily.

6. Nettle

Nettle has been found to work effectively as a natural antihistamine. It can help reduce the symptoms of allergies, such as itching and swelling. You can give your dog or cat 100-200 mg of dried nettle leaf per 10 lbs of body weight, once or twice daily.

7. Turmeric

Turmeric is a powerful anti-inflammatory spice that can help manage conditions like allergic skin disease. Curcumin, the active compound in turmeric, also supports the body's natural cortisol production, which can reduce inflammation without the negative side effects of synthetic steroids. The typical dose is 250 mg per 50 lbs of body weight, twice daily.

8. Colostrum

Colostrum, often referred to as "mother's first milk," is rich in immune-boosting properties and can help heal the gut, reduce inflammation, and improve overall health. It's especially helpful for pets with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). The recommended dose is 100 mg per 10 lbs of body weight, twice daily.

While Prednisone can be a valuable tool in veterinary medicine, its side effects—especially with long-term use—are significant and should not be ignored. Before starting your pet on this corticosteroid, explore natural alternatives that can help manage symptoms with fewer risks. Whether it's topical treatments, herbal supplements, or essential fatty acids, there are many options available that can help your pet live a healthy, balanced life without the dangers of long-term Prednisone use.

Heal Your Pet At Home!

Best Wishes,
Dr. Andrew

