

# Hydrocortisone (Oral)

(hye-droe-kor-ti-zon)

**Category:** Glucocorticoid

**Other Names for this Medication:** Cortef®, Solu-Cortef®

**Common Dosage Forms: Veterinary:** None. **Human:** 5 mg, 10 mg, & 20 mg tablets.

This information sheet does not contain all available information for this medication. It is to help answer commonly asked questions and help you give the medication safely and effectively to your animal. If you have other questions or need more information, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist.

## Key Information

- ▶ Give this medicine with food.
- ▶ Goal is to find the lowest dose possible and use it for the shortest period of time.
- ▶ Most common side effects seen (often with long-term use) with this drug are: greater appetite, thirst, and need to urinate.
- ▶ In dogs, stomach or intestinal ulcers, perforation, or bleeding can occur. If your animal stops eating or you notice a high fever, black tarry stools or bloody vomit, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- ▶ Do not stop therapy abruptly without your veterinarian's guidance as serious side effects could occur.

## How is this medication useful?

In animals, hydrocortisone can be used to treat hypoadrenocorticism (Addison's disease), and can be used as an anti-inflammatory drug, immunosuppressive drug, and antineoplastic agent (anticancer). Dosages vary for each of these uses.

The FDA (U.S. Food & Drug Administration) has approved this drug for use in humans, but it is not officially approved for use in animals. The FDA allows veterinarians to prescribe and use human products containing this drug in animals in certain situations. You and your veterinarian can discuss why this drug is the most appropriate choice.

## What should I tell my veterinarian to see if this medication can be safely given to my animal?

Many things might affect how well this drug will work in your animal. Be sure to discuss the following with your veterinarian so together you can make the best treatment decisions.

- ▶ Other drugs can interact with this medication, so be sure to tell your veterinarian and pharmacist what medications (including vitamins, supplements, or herbal therapies) you give your animal, including the amount and time you give each.
- ▶ Tell your veterinarian about any conditions or diseases your animal may have now or has had in the past.
- ▶ If your animal has been treated for the same disease or condition in the past, tell your veterinarian about the treatment and how well it did or did not work.
- ▶ If your animal is pregnant or nursing, talk to your veterinarian about the risks of using this drug.
- ▶ Tell your veterinarian and pharmacist about any medication side effects (including allergic reactions, lack of apanimalite, diarrhea, itching, hair loss) your animal has developed in the past.

## When should this medication not be used or be used very carefully?

No drug is 100% safe in all patients, but your veterinarian will discuss with you any specific concerns about using this drug in your animal.

This drug **SHOULD NOT** be used in patients:

- ▶ That are allergic to it.
- ▶ With a fungal infection (unless using it during an Addisonian crisis).
- ▶ That have stomach or intestinal ulcers.
- ▶ With untreated Cushing's disease (too much stress hormone being made in the body).

This drug should be used **WITH CAUTION** in patients:

- ▶ That are receiving other drugs that can cause stomach ulcers, including aspirin or NSAIDs (eg, carprofen, flunixin, meloxicam)
- ▶ That have diabetes mellitus (ie, sugar diabetes).
- ▶ That have heart disease.
- ▶ That are pregnant.
- ▶ That have a bacterial infection.
- ▶ That are young and growing. This drug can slow growth when used for a long time.

If your animal matches any of these conditions, talk to your veterinarian about the potential risks versus benefits.

## What are the side effects of this medication?

No drug is 100% safe in all patients, but your veterinarian will discuss with you any specific concerns about using this drug in your animal.

### **Side effects that usually are not serious include:**

- ▶ Greater appetite, thirst, and need to urinate.
- ▶ Vomiting, Diarrhea.
- ▶ Mild behavioral changes.
- ▶ Panting more than usual (in dogs).

You don't have to be overly concerned if you see any of these unless they are severe, worsen, or continue to be a problem. Contact your veterinarian if this happens.

### **Side effects that may be serious or indicate a serious problem:**

- ▶ Stomach or intestinal ulcers/perforation/bleeding. If your animal stops eating, or you see a high fever, black tarry stools or bloody vomit (coffee ground appearance), contact your veterinarian immediately.
- ▶ After using the drug for several weeks or more: Weight gain, pot belly, skin or coat changes, hair loss, or weakness, any of which may mean the dose is too high. If you see any of these, contact your veterinarian.
- ▶ Excessive thirst and urinations with excessive appetite in the face of weight loss. These signs can be seen commonly with this drug, but may also indicate diabetes.

- ▶ Severe behavior changes (eg, aggression/threatening actions). Contact your veterinarian immediately if this occurs.
- ▶ Low energy level may indicate an infection. Because hydrocortisone can suppress immune function when used at high dosages, patients are susceptible to infections. Lethargy may be the only sign you see as the typical signs (fever, frequent or painful urination) alerting you of an infection are masked by the medication. If you are concerned about the possibility of infection, contact your veterinarian immediately.

### **If my animal gets too much of this medication (an overdose), what should I do?**

If you witness or suspect an overdose, contact your veterinarian or an animal poison control center for further advice. Animal poison control centers open 24 hours a day include: **Animal Poison HELPLINE** (855-764-7661) and **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center** (888-426-4435); a consultation fee may be charged for these services.

### **How should this medication be given?**

For this medication to work properly, give it exactly as your veterinarian has prescribed. Check the prescription label to be sure you are giving the drug correctly.

- ▶ Give medicine with food. This may help prevent vomiting after a dose and possibly prevent stomach ulcers/bleeding.
- ▶ If given once daily, hydrocortisone is usually given in the morning to dogs and in the evening to cats as this will more closely mimic their natural hormone cycles.
- ▶ Your veterinarian may prescribe a tapering (reducing) dose of this medication. More medication is given early in therapy and the dose is slowly reduced over time. If you have any questions on how much or how often to give this medication, consult with your veterinarian or pharmacist.
- ▶ Compounded liquid forms of this medication must be measured carefully. Your veterinarian or pharmacist can help by providing special measuring spoons or syringes.
- ▶ If you have difficulty getting your animal to take the medicine, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist for tips to help with dosing and reduce the stress of medication time for both you and your animal.
- ▶ This medication can be given for various lengths of time. Be sure you understand how long your veterinarian wants you to continue giving this medication. Prescription refills may be necessary before the therapy will be complete. If you want to stop giving this medication, talk to your veterinarian, as there may be important reasons to continue giving it.

### **What should I do if I miss giving my animal a dose of this medication?**

If you miss a dose, give it when you remember, but if it is close enough to the time for the next dose, skip the dose you missed and give it at the next scheduled time. After that, return to the regular dosing schedule. Do not double-up or give extra doses.

### **How should I store this medication?**

- ▶ Store this medication in the original prescription bottle or an approved dosage reminder container (ie, pill minder) at room temperature and protected from light.
- ▶ If your veterinarian or pharmacist has prepared (compounded) a special formulation for your animal, follow the storage recommendations and expiration date for the product.
- ▶ Keep away from children and other animals.

### **Can handling this medication be hazardous to me, my family, or other pets?**

There are no specific precautions required when handling this medication unless you are allergic to it. Wash your hands after handling any medication.

### **How should I dispose of this medication if I don't use it all?**

- ▶ Do not flush this medication down the toilet or wash it down the sink. If a community drug "take-back" program is available, use this option. If there is no take-back program, mix the drug with coffee grounds or cat litter (to make it undesirable to children and animals and unrecognizable to people who might go through your trash), place the mixture in a sealable plastic bag to keep it from leaking out, and throw the bag out with the regular trash.
- ▶ Do not save leftover medication for future use or give it to others to use.

### **What other information is important for this medication?**

- ▶ Your veterinarian will need to do tests and evaluate your animal to properly adjust the dose of this drug if your animal is on it long-term.
- ▶ If your animal has been on high doses of hydrocortisone or other immunosuppressive drugs, vaccinations may not be effective. Talk to your veterinarian about keeping your animal protected while your animal is receiving the drug.
- ▶ If you are seeing a different veterinarian than normal, be sure to tell them your dog is taking this drug. Dogs that require surgery or are stressed from trauma or illness may require additional medications.
- ▶ Use of this drug may not be allowed in certain animal competitions. Check rules and regulations before entering your animal in a competition while this medication is being administered.

### **If you have any other questions or concerns about this medication, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist.**