

Nutrition for the Child on Steroids

(Prednisone, ACTH and other steroid medicines)



Steroids may cause nutrition concerns. This handout helps you think about concerns and shares tips to help manage your concerns.

Some nutrition concerns that can happen when your child is on steroids include:

- **Fluid retention.** This can cause swelling of the hands, feet and face. It can also cause high blood pressure and extra weight gain.
- **Increased appetite.** Eating more can cause rapid weight gain.
- **Increased calcium needs:** Calcium losses from bones are increased with steroids. Good calcium and vitamin D intake is needed to prevent weakening of bones.
- **Increased blood sugar levels.** Simple sugars in the diet may need to be cut back.

How you can help

Look for and give your child foods that are:

- **Low in sodium (salt).** This will help limit fluid retention and high blood pressure.
- **High in calcium and vitamin D.** These help replace calcium losses from bones.
- **Have no concentrated sweets.** This is helpful if high blood sugars happen.

For babies: Breast-feed or give formula as usual. Offer foods with calcium that your baby can eat. If your baby is breastfed, talk to your doctor or dietitian about vitamin D supplements.

Tips to lower salt in the diet

- **Do not put the salt shaker on the table.**
- **Limit condiments. Use fresh herbs and spices or salt free seasonings.**
- **Do not use foods if you can see salt on them.**
- **Do not use salt in cooking or baking.**
- **Limit use of processed foods and use fresh foods whenever possible.** Processed meats like ham, bacon, hot dogs and deli meats are very high in salt. Boxed meals like macaroni and cheese, skillet meals and rice or pasta pouches can also have a lot of salt.
- **Limit salt when eating out.** Order sandwiches without sauce, ketchup, mustard, cheese or pickles. Ask for French fries to be unsalted. Do not choose soup. Choose small or regular size items instead of large or super-size. Add a side item of fruit or a vegetable.

Nutrition Facts
 Serving Size: 1 Cup (30g)
 Servings Per Package: TBD

Amount Per Serving	Cereal	Cereal With 1/2 Cup Skim Milk
Calories	120	100
Calories from Fat	10	10
% Daily Value**		
Total Fat 1g*	1%	2%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%	0%
Trans Fat 0g		
Polyunsaturated Fat 0g		
Monounsaturated Fat 0g		
Cholesterol 0mg	0%	1%
Sodium 200mg	8%	11%
Potassium 60mg	2%	7%
Total Carbohydrate 25g	8%	10%
Dietary Fiber 1g	5%	5%
Sugars 13g		
Protein 2g		

Read the Nutrition facts labels.

The Nutrition Facts label can help you figure out how much sodium is in each serving of a food.

The nutrition information is based on the serving size. You must **look at the serving size** on the first line of the food label. You will need to figure out the amount of sodium your child eats based on how much food they eat.

For the label on the left, if your child eats:

- 1 cup of the food = 200 mg sodium.
- 1/2 cup of the food = 100 mg sodium.
- 1/4 cup of the food = 50 mg sodium

Tips to increase calcium and vitamin D

Eat 3 to 4 servings of dairy each day. Focus on foods like milk or alternative milks, low sugar yogurt, unsalted almonds and green leafy vegetables.

Nutrition Facts
 Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
 Servings per Container 2

Amount Per Serving	Calories from Fat 120
Calories 280	
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 13g	20%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%
Trans Fat 2g	
Cholesterol 2mg	10%
Sodium 660mg	28%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 3g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A 4%	Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 15%	Iron 4%

Food labels list calcium as a percent daily value.

- Add a zero to the percent daily value to know the amount of calcium per serving of the food.
- Looking at the label to the left, 15% means there is 150 mg calcium in this food per 1 cup serving

Tips to manage blood sugars

If your child's blood sugars are too high, follow these recommendations.

- Drink water and sugar-free drinks. Avoid regular soda, fruit drinks and other sugary drinks. Even 100% juice has a lot of sugar and should be avoided. These drinks cause blood sugars to increase very quickly.
- Eat whole grain and high fiber foods. High fiber foods are fruits, vegetables, beans and legumes. Aim for 3 grams of fiber per serving of grains.
- Eat three balanced meals that include protein and fat, and are spaced throughout the day.

This document was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse or clinic if you or your child have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.