

DEXAMETHASONE for the treatment of cancer

Other names: Dexamethasone Douglas®



Important note: The following information is intended to add to, not replace, the knowledge and judgment of your doctor, pharmacist or other health care professional.

Why you are taking this medication

Dexamethasone (dex-a-METH-a-son) is a steroid drug that is used to treat many types of medical problems including some types of cancer. It is a tablet that you take by mouth.

It is important to take dexamethasone exactly as directed by your doctor. Make sure you understand the directions. It is better to take the dexamethasone with food and a glass of water or milk.

For once a day dosing:

- Take your dexamethasone in the morning with breakfast. This mimics your body's natural rhythm of steroid production.
- If you miss a dose of dexamethasone take it as soon as you can if it is within 12 hours of the missed dose. If it is over 12 hours since your missed dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your usual dosing times.

Do not stop taking dexamethasone without telling your doctor. If you are taking dexamethasone regularly, make sure that you always have a new supply on hand before you run out. After long term use, your dose of dexamethasone will be reduced very slowly before stopping. This helps your body adjust to making its own steroid again. Long term side effects will return to normal very slowly after stopping.

Store dexamethasone tablets out of the reach of children, at room temperature, away from heat, light and moisture.

Do not have any immunisations or vaccinations without your doctor's approval while being treated with dexamethasone.

Tell doctors or dentists that you are being treated with dexamethasone before you receive any treatment from them.

If you are taking dexamethasone for more than a few days at a time, ask your doctor if you need to carry a card or wear a medical alert bracelet or tag to inform doctors in an emergency as you may need extra steroids.

Other medication

Other drugs may interact with dexamethasone. Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking other medicine including herbal or complementary products and medicines you can buy without a prescription.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new medicines.

Alcohol may increase the risk of some side effects of dexamethasone. Avoid drinking alcohol while being treated with dexamethasone.

Pregnancy and breast feeding

It is best to use birth control while being treated with dexamethasone. Dexamethasone may affect sperm production and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy.

Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant.

Do not breast feed during treatment with dexamethasone.

Side effects

Unfortunately as well as having good effects, most medicines have some effects on your body that are unwanted. These are called *side effects*.

Side effects are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. Tips to help manage the side effects are included.

SIDE EFFECTS	WHAT TO DO
Heartburn and indigestion may occur. There may be an increased risk of stomach problems such as bleeding ulcers especially if you have had stomach problems before.	To help with heartburn or indigestion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take your dexamethasone with food. • Take antacids one hour before or two hours after dexamethasone. <u>Note</u>: do not take antacids within one hour before or two hours after dexamethasone. Antacids can reduce the effectiveness of dexamethasone when taken at the same time. <p>Some medicines such as aspirin or ibuprofen may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by a doctor. • For minor pain, try paracetamol first.
Sugar control may be affected in diabetics. Some people may become diabetic when treated with dexamethasone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check your blood or urine sugar regularly if you usually use test strips.
Swelling of hands, feet or lower legs occur if your body retains extra fluid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate your feet when sitting. • Avoid tight clothing. • Avoid foods high in salt or sodium.
You may have difficulty in falling asleep on the days you take dexamethasone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mild exercise before bed (such as a walk around the block) may help.

SIDE EFFECTS	WHAT TO DO
Increased appetite and weight gain may occur. With long term continuous use, your face and shoulders may become rounded even without weight gain. This will slowly return to normal once you stop taking dexamethasone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat healthy, well balanced meals.
Your body's ability to handle illness or injury is weakened by dexamethasone. This will slowly return to normal once you stop taking dexamethasone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check with your doctor if you have an infection, illness or injury. • You may need extra steroids to help you get better.
Depression may occur with long term use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you feel depressed, discuss your symptoms with your doctor as it may be drug related.
High blood pressure may occur with long term use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have your blood pressure checked regularly. • Avoid foods and beverages high in salt or sodium.
Bone loss (osteoporosis) may occur with long term use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the risk of bone loss with your doctor.

See your doctor or get emergency help immediately if you have:

- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (a body temperature over 38°C); chills; cough; sore throat; pain or burning when you pass urine; redness, pain or swelling of any area of your body; sores forming anywhere on your body.
- Signs of **bleeding ulcers** such as black, tarry stools (bowel motions); blood in stool; continuing stomach or abdominal pain.

See your doctor as soon as possible (during office hours) if you have:

- Signs of **fluid problems** such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, swelling of feet or lower legs, rapid weight gain.
- Signs of **low potassium** such as vomiting, muscle cramps or weakness, numbness or tingling of the lower legs and feet, mental confusion.
- Signs of **blood sugar problems** such as thirst, needing to drink a lot, or frequent need to pass urine (need to pee a lot).
- Signs of **bone problems** such as pain in your back, ribs, arms or legs.
- Changes in your **eye sight**.

Check with your doctor if any of the following continue or bother you:

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea.
- For diabetics: uncontrolled blood sugars.
- For women: changes in menstrual periods.
- Unusual bruising.
- Wounds that do not heal.
- Mood changes, nervousness, problems sleeping.
- Acne or other skin changes.

Read this leaflet and discuss any questions you have about your medicines with your doctor or pharmacist