



For the Patient: **Dexamethasone**  
Other names: DECADRON®  
DEXASONE®  
HEXADROL®

## BC Cancer Agency

- **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. The tablet may contain lactose.
- It is important to **take** dexamethasone exactly as directed by your doctor. Make sure you understand the directions. Dexamethasone should be taken **with food** with a glass of water or juice.
- **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.
- Other drugs such as carbamazepine (TEGRETOL®), phenytoin (DILANTIN®), and primidone (MYSOLINE®) may **interact** with dexamethasone. Tell your doctor if you are taking these or any other drugs as your dose of these drugs may need to be changed. There may be an increased risk of potassium problems with some drugs such as digoxin (LANOXIN®) and some water pills (diuretics) such as furosemide (LASIX®) and hydrochlorothiazide (HYDRODIURIL®). Your doctor may need to monitor these drugs and their effects more closely while you are taking dexamethasone. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new drugs.
- **Alcohol** may increase the risk of some side effects of dexamethasone. Avoid drinking alcohol while being treated with dexamethasone.
- Dexamethasone may affect sperm production and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to **use birth control** while being treated with dexamethasone. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. **Do not breast feed** during treatment.
- **Do not** have any immunizations 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.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Heartburn and indigestion</b> may occur. There may be an increased risk of stomach problems such as bleeding ulcers especially if you have had stomach problems before.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take your dexamethasone after eating.</li> <li>Take antacids one hour before or two hours after dexamethasone. Antacids can reduce the amount of dexamethasone absorbed when taken at the same time.</li> </ul> <p>Some medications such as ASA (e.g., ASPIRIN®) or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) may increase your risk of stomach problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., <b>ASA for your heart</b>).</li> <li>For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sugar control</b> may be affected in diabetics. Some people may become diabetic when treated with dexamethasone (see below for “signs of blood sugar problems”).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check your blood sugar regularly if you are diabetic.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Swelling</b> of hands, feet or lower legs occur if your body retains extra fluid.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elevate your feet when sitting.</li> <li>Avoid tight clothing.</li> <li>Avoid food with high salt or sodium.</li> </ul>
<p>You may have <b>difficulty in falling asleep</b> on the days you take dexamethasone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mild exercise before bed (such as a walk around the block) may help.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Increased appetite and weight gain</b> may occur. With long term continuous use, your face and shoulders may become rounded even without weight gain. This will return to normal slowly once you stop taking dexamethasone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eat healthy, well balanced meals.</li> <li>Your appetite will return to normal once you stop taking dexamethasone.</li> </ul>
<p>Your body’s ability to handle <b>illness or injury</b> is weakened by dexamethasone. This will return to normal slowly once you stop taking dexamethasone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check with your doctor if you have an infection, illness or injury.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Depression</b> may occur with long term use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you feel depressed, discuss your symptoms with your doctor as it may be drug related.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bone loss</b> (osteoporosis) may occur with long term use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss the risk of bone loss with your doctor.</li> </ul>
<p><b>High blood pressure</b> may occur with long term use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check your blood pressure regularly</li> <li>Avoid foods and beverages with high salt or sodium.</li> </ul>

**SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:**

- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 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; 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 and frequent need to pass urine
- Changes in **eye sight**

**CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONTINUE OR BOTHER YOU:**

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- 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

**REPORT ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS TO YOUR DOCTOR**

Notes:

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