

Dexamethasone (Decadron)

About This Drug

Dexamethasone is used to treat cancer, to decrease inflammation and sometimes used before and after chemotherapy to prevent or treat nausea and/or vomiting. It is given in the vein (IV) or orally (by mouth).

Possible Side Effects

- Headache
- High blood pressure
- Abnormal heartbeat
- Tiredness and weakness
- Changes in mood, which may include depression or a feeling of extreme well-being
- Trouble sleeping
- Increased sweating
- Increased appetite (increased hunger)
- Weight gain
- Increase risk of infections
- Pain in your abdomen
- Nausea
- Skin changes such as rash, dryness, redness
- Blood sugar levels may change
- Electrolyte changes
- Swelling of your legs, ankles and/or feet
- Changes in your liver function
- You may be at risk for cataracts, glaucoma or infections of the eye
- Muscle loss and/or weakness (lack of muscle strength)
- Increased risk of developing osteoporosis- your bones may become weak and brittle

Note: *Not all possible side effects are included above.*

Warnings and Precautions

- This drug may cause you to feel irritable, nervous or restless.

- Allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis are rare but may happen in some patients. Signs of allergic reaction to this drug may be swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way. **If this happens, do not take another dose of this drug. You should get urgent medical treatment.**
- High blood pressure and changes in electrolytes, which can cause fluid build-up around your heart, lungs or elsewhere.
- Increased risk of developing a hole in your stomach, small, and/or large intestine if you have ulcers in the lining of your stomach and/or intestine, or have diverticulitis, ulcerative colitis and/or other diseases that affect the gastrointestinal tract.
- Effects on the endocrine glands including the pituitary, adrenals or thyroid during or after use of this medication.
- Changes in the tissue of the heart, that can cause your heart to have less ability to pump blood. You may be short of breath or your arms, hands, legs and feet may swell.
- Increased risk of heart attack
- Severe depression and other psychiatric disorders such as mood changes.
- Burning, pain and itching around your anus may happen when this drug is given in the vein too rapidly (IV). It usually happens suddenly and resolves in less than 1 minute.

Important Information

- Talk to your doctor or your nurse before stopping this medication, it should be stopped gradually. Depending on the dose and length of treatment, you could experience serious side effects if stopped abruptly (suddenly).
- Talk to your doctor before receiving any vaccinations during your treatment. Some vaccinations are not recommended while receiving dexamethasone.

How to Take Your Medication

- **For Oral (by mouth):** You can take the medicine with or without food. If you have nausea or upset stomach, take it with food.
- **Missed dose:** If you miss a dose, do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.
- If you vomit a dose, take your next dose at the regular time. Do not take 2 doses at the same time
- **Handling:** Wash your hands after handling your medicine, your caretakers should not handle your medicine with bare hands and should wear latex gloves.
- **Storage:** Store this medicine in the original container at room temperature. Protect from moisture and light. Discuss with your nurse or your doctor how to dispose of unused medicine.

Treating Side Effects

- Drink plenty of fluids (a minimum of eight glasses per day is recommended).
- To help with nausea and vomiting, eat small, frequent meals instead of three large meals a day. Choose foods and drinks that are at room temperature. Ask your nurse or doctor about other helpful tips and medicine that is available to help stop or lessen these symptoms.



- If you throw up, you should drink more fluids so that you do not become dehydrated (lack of water in the body from losing too much fluid).
- Manage tiredness by pacing your activities for the day.
- Be sure to include periods of rest between energy-draining activities.
- To help with muscle weakness, get regular exercise. If you feel too tired to exercise vigorously, try taking a short walk.
- If you are having trouble sleeping, talk to your nurse or doctor on tips to help you sleep better.
- If you are feeling depressed, talk to your nurse or doctor about it.
- Keeping your pain under control is important to your well-being. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you are experiencing pain.
- If you have diabetes, keep good control of your blood sugar level. Tell your nurse or your doctor if your glucose levels are higher or lower than normal.
- To decrease the risk of infection, wash your hands regularly.
- Avoid close contact with people who have a cold, the flu, or other infections.
- Take your temperature as your doctor or nurse tells you, and whenever you feel like you may have a fever.
- If you get a rash do not put anything on it unless your doctor or nurse says you may. Keep the area around the rash clean and dry. Ask your doctor for medicine if your rash bothers you.
- Moisturize your skin several times a day.
- Avoid sun exposure and apply sunscreen routinely when outdoors.

Food and Drug Interactions

- This drug may interact with grapefruit and grapefruit juice. Talk to your doctor as this could make side effects worse.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist about all other prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs and others) you are taking before starting this medicine as there are known drug interactions with dexamethasone. Also, check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new prescription or over-the-counter medicines, or dietary supplement to make sure that there are no interactions.
- There are known interactions of dexamethasone with other medicines and products like acetaminophen, aspirin, and ibuprofen. Ask your doctor what over-the-counter (OTC) medicines you can take.
- Avoid the use of St. John's Wort while taking dexamethasone as this may lower the levels of the drug in your body, which can make it less effective

When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor or nurse if you have any of these symptoms and/or any new or unusual symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher
- Chills
- A headache that does not go away
- Trouble breathing



- Blurry vision or other changes in eyesight
- Feel irritable, nervous or restless
- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Severe mood changes such as depression or unusual thoughts and/or behaviors
- Thoughts of hurting yourself or others, and suicide
- Tiredness that interferes with your daily activities
- Feeling that your heart is beating in a fast, slow or not normal way
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Chest pain or symptoms of a heart attack. Most heart attacks involve pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes. The pain may go away and come back, or it can be constant. It can feel like pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain. Sometimes pain is felt in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach. **If any of these symptoms last 2 minutes, call 911.**
- Heartburn or indigestion
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking and/or is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Throwing up more than 3 times a day
- Pain in your abdomen that does not go away
- Abnormal blood sugar
- Unusual thirst, passing urine often, headache, sweating, shakiness, irritability
- Swelling of legs, ankles, or feet
- Weight gain of 5 pounds in one week (fluid retention)
- Signs of possible liver problems: dark urine, pale bowel movements, bad stomach pain, feeling very tired and weak, unusual itching, or yellowing of the eyes or skin
- Severe muscle weakness
- A new rash or a rash that is not relieved by prescribed medicines
- Signs of allergic reaction: swelling of the face, feeling like your tongue or throat are swelling, trouble breathing, rash, itching, fever, chills, feeling dizzy, and/or feeling that your heart is beating in a fast or not normal way. **If this happens, call 911 for emergency care.**
- If you think you may be pregnant

Reproduction Warnings

- **Pregnancy warning:** It is not known if this drug may harm an unborn child. For this reason, be sure to talk with your doctor if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant while receiving this drug. Let your doctor know right away if you think you may be pregnant or may have impregnated your partner.
- **Breastfeeding warning:** It is not known if this drug passes into breast milk. For this reason, women should talk to their doctor about the risks and benefits of breastfeeding during treatment with this drug because this drug may enter the breast milk and cause harm to a breastfeeding baby.
- **Fertility warning:** Human fertility studies have not been done with this drug. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you plan to have children. Ask for information on sperm banking.

Revised July 2020

