

Hydrocortisone (Cortef®, Solu-Cortef®)

About This Drug

Hydrocortisone is a steroid that may be used to treat cancer. It is given in the vein (IV), as an injection in your muscle (intramuscularly) or orally (by mouth).

Possible Side Effects

- Increased sweating
- Nausea
- Aggravation of stomach ulcers
- Pain in your abdomen
- Weight gain
- Increased appetite (increased hunger)
- Mood changes
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling restless (unable to relax)
- Headache
- Changes to your skin
- Swelling of your legs, ankles and/or feet. You may have facial swelling (moon face). You may have fluid build around your lungs and/or your heart.

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

Warnings and Precautions

- Severe infections, including viral, bacterial and fungal, which can be life-threatening
- 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.
- If you have a history of heart disease, you may be at an increased risk of congestive heart failure. You may be short of breath. Your arms, hands, legs and feet may swell.
- Severe high blood pressure

- Severe sores in the lining of your stomach and/or intestine that may lead to a hole in your stomach, small, and/or large intestine
- Blood sugar levels may change. If you have diabetes, changes may need to be made to your diabetes medication.
- Effects on the pituitary, adrenal, and thyroid glands. Some hormones may not be produced. Your doctor may prescribe replacement steroids.
- Changes in your pancreas function
- Severe muscle weakness
- Severe mood changes such as depression or unusual thoughts and/or behaviors
- Vision changes
- Osteoporosis- your bones may become weak and brittle
- A rare type of sarcoma has been reported
- Increased white blood cells
- Blood clots and events such as stroke and heart attack. A blood clot in your leg may cause your leg to swell, appear red and warm, and/or cause pain. A blood clot in your lungs may cause trouble breathing, pain when breathing, and/or chest pain.

Important Information

- Talk to your doctor or your nurse before stopping this medication, it should be stopped gradually. 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 hydrocortisone.

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, take it as soon as you think about it unless it is close to your next regular dose. Do not take 2 doses at the same time and do not double up on the next dose.
- **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. 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).
- If you throw up or have loose bowel movements, you should drink more fluids so that you do not become dehydrated (lack of water in the body from losing too much fluid).
- 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 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.

Food and Drug Interactions

- Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while taking this medicine. Grapefruit and grapefruit juice may raise the levels of hydrocortisone in your body. This could make side effects worse.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist about all other prescription medicines and dietary supplements you are taking before starting this medicine as there are known drug interactions with hydrocortisone. 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 hydrocortisone with aspirin and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen. Ask your doctor what over-the-counter (OTC) medicines you can take for fever, headache and muscle and joint pain.

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
- Tiredness that interferes with your daily activities
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Wheezing and/or trouble breathing
- 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. 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.**
- Symptoms of a stroke such as sudden numbness or weakness of your face, arm, or leg, mostly on one side of your body; sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking, feeling dizzy, loss of balance or coordination; or sudden, bad headache with no known cause. **If you have any of these symptoms for 2 minutes, call 911.**
- Nausea that stops you from eating or drinking or relieved by prescribed medicine
- Throwing up more than 3 times a day
- Severe abdominal pain that does not go away
- Swelling of legs, ankles, or feet
- Severe muscle weakness
- Weight gain of 5 pounds in one week (fluid retention)
- Abnormal blood sugar
- Unusual thirst, passing urine often, headache, sweating, shakiness, irritability
- Your leg or arm is swollen, red, warm and/or painful

- 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 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:** 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 or egg banking.

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