

## Dexamethasone

### What is dexamethasone (deks-a-METH-a-son)?

- Dexamethasone is a corticosteroid (or steroid) used to treat inflammation and swelling. This decrease in swelling helps to decrease symptoms from your brain tumor
- Steroids are medications that are similar to natural hormones produced in your body
- The brand name for this medication is Decadron™

### How is this medication given?

- This medication is available as a tablet. Your doctor will tell you how much of this medication to take and how often.
- It must be taken with food to reduce stomach upset.
- Dexamethasone is usually started with a dose given multiple times per day
- Over time, this medication may also be given as a “taper”. This means the dose of the medication is slowly decreased over a period of time.
  - As the dose of dexamethasone is decreased, symptoms from your brain tumor may re-appear or worsen. If this happens, the “taper” (or decrease) will stop. You may even need an increase in your dose.
  - Our goal is to give you the lowest dose of dexamethasone that relieves your symptoms
- Follow your doctor’s specific instructions on how to take this medication.

### What can I expect with this medication?

- The most common side effects associated with this medication include:
  - Short term side effects. Side effects that may occur as soon as the medication is started:
    - “Jittery” feeling, hyperactivity or mood changes
    - Difficulty sleeping. **Do NOT take at bedtime.** Take your last dose no later than with dinner
    - High blood pressure
    - Fluid retention
    - Muscle weakness (usually in the legs)
    - Increase in blood sugar levels
    - Rash, similar to acne
    - Increased appetite

- Long term side effects. Side effects that usually occur after several weeks to months of treatment:
  - Increase risk for infection
  - Re-distribution of fat to the face or shoulders
  - Weight gain
  - Osteoporosis or weakening of the bones. To reduce the potential for bone destruction, it is important to take calcium with vitamin D supplementation. At least 1200 mg of elemental calcium and 800 IU of vitamin D per day should be taken. Available over the counter.
- Rare, but serious side effects of dexamethasone include:
  - Delayed healing of wounds
  - Gastrointestinal ulcer
    - Report any signs of severe abdominal pain or signs of bleeding such as blood in stool, dark tarry stools, or coughing up blood
    - To protect your stomach, you should take a medication to reduce the acid in your stomach such as Prilosec™ (omeprazole) or Prevacid™ (lansoprazole). These are available over the counter
  - Adrenal insufficiency – because dexamethasone mimics natural hormones your body stops making these hormones while you take dexamethasone. Doses of dexamethasone must be slowly tapered over time to allow your body to produce its natural hormones again. **Do not stop taking this medication suddenly without taking to your doctor.**

#### **If you miss a dose of this medication**

- **If your schedule is one dose every day** – take the missed dose as soon as possible, then go back to your regular schedule
- **If your schedule is more than once a day** – take the dose as soon as possible. If it is almost time for your next dose, take two doses at that time, then go back to your regular schedule.
- **If your schedule is one dose every other day** – if you cannot take the dose until late in the day, wait until the next morning to take your medicine. Then skip a day and go back to your regular schedule.