

Dexamethasone

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

- Dexamethasone is a corticosteroid (or steroid) used to treat a number of different conditions, such as inflammation, severe allergies, adrenal problems, brain tumors, blood or bone marrows problems and more. It works on the immune system to help relieve symptoms related to your diagnosis.
- 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 can be taken orally as a tablet or elixir or peripherally through an IV. 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 may re-appear or worsen. If this happens, reach out to your clinical team.
 - 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.
- ***Do not stop taking this medication suddenly.***

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
- Increase in 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.

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 the medication with food.
- 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 talking 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 the next scheduled dose, 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.

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