

## Dexamethasone

### Description

Dexamethasone (also called Decadron<sup>®</sup>) is a man-made steroid medicine. It works like a natural steroid that is made in your body. This medicine has several uses:

- to relieve inflammation (swelling, heat, redness, and pain)
- to treat certain types of cancer
- to treat severe allergies and asthma
- to treat nausea and vomiting

### Dexamethasone comes in many forms

Dexamethasone is available as tablets of several different strengths. The following is a list of the different tablet strengths and their colors. These tablets are taken by mouth.

- 0.25-mg peach tablet
- 0.5-mg pale yellow tablet
- 0.75-mg pale blue tablet
- 1-mg cream tablet
- 1.5-mg pink tablet
- 2-mg white tablet
- 4-mg pale green tablet
- 6-mg aqua tablet

Dexamethasone is also available as a clear liquid taken by mouth and as a clear liquid given by vein (IV).

### How to give dexamethasone

- Your dose of dexamethasone will change as you grow. The drug comes in many different strengths. So read the directions on your bottle of medicine carefully to make sure you take the medicine correctly. The strength and number of tablets you take may change often. If you are concerned about a new tablet or dose, please call the pharmacy to make sure you are taking the right dose and tablet strength.
- Always take this medicine with food or milk to decrease stomach burning.

*This document is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Our aim is to promote active participation in your care and treatment by providing information and education. Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician.*

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### Possible side effects

#### Early

- Stomach irritation (burning)

#### Late (usually more than a day after treatment starts)

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Changes in personality and mood
- Increased appetite
- Problems sleeping
- Acne
- Eye problems (cataracts, glaucoma)
- Changes in menstrual cycles
- Weight gain, mainly in the face and abdomen
- Water retention that can increase the blood pressure
- Increased white blood count, but decreased numbers of infection-fighting cells
- Increased blood sugar levels
- Decreased potassium levels in the blood, especially if you are taking other medicines that also decrease potassium levels in the blood

#### After taking dexamethasone for a long time

- Decreased muscle mass and muscle weakness
- Impaired wound healing
- Decreased growth
- Thin fragile skin
- Weakened bones

These are the most common side effects, but there may be others. Please report all side effects to the doctor or nurse.

**In case of a severe side effect or reaction, call the doctor, nurse or pharmacist at 595-3300. If you are outside the Memphis area, dial toll-free 1-866-2STJUDE (1-866-278-5833), and press 0 once the call is connected.**

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### Special instructions

- **Do not stop taking this medicine** until your doctor tells you to do so.
- Dexamethasone can hide a fever. Watch for signs of infection, and tell the doctor or nurse as soon as possible if you see such signs. (See “Do you know... The signs of infection.”)
- Wash your face 2 times a day with soap and water to decrease the chance of having temporary acne.
- Your doctor may put you on a low-sodium, high-protein diet. Sodium (salt) increases the amount of water your body holds. The clinical dietitian will tell you what foods to avoid and will suggest snacks to help you deal with increased appetite.
- Urine and blood tests may be needed to check for high sugar levels.
- Blood tests may be needed to check potassium levels. A potassium medicine taken by mouth may be prescribed to keep your blood potassium level normal.
- Dexamethasone may affect the way some medicines work. Some medicines may also affect the way dexamethasone works. These medicines include:
  - Insulin,
  - Warfarin,
  - Digoxin,
  - Phenytoin,
  - Phenobarbital,
  - Furosemide
  - Ketoconazole
  - Aspirin, ibuprofen, and
  - Rifampin.

Always tell your doctor if you are taking any of these medicines, or if you start taking any new medicine while you are taking dexamethasone.

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