PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Hydroxyurea

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US

Droxia; Hydrea; Siklos; Xromi

Brand Names: Canada

APO-Hydroxyurea; Hydrea; MYLAN-Hydroxyurea; RIVA-Hydroxyurea

Warning

- This drug may lower the ability of your bone marrow to make blood cells that your body needs. This can lead to very bad and sometimes deadly bleeding problems or infections. Tell your doctor right away if you have signs of infection like fever, chills, very bad sore throat, ear or sinus pain, cough, more sputum or change in color of sputum, pain with passing urine, mouth sores, a wound that will not heal; any bruising or bleeding; or if you feel very tired or weak.
- If you have bone marrow problems like low platelet count, low red blood cell count, or low white blood cell count, talk with your doctor. This drug may not be right for some people with these problems.
- Have your blood work and other lab tests checked as you have been told by your doctor.
- This drug may raise the chance of getting cancer. A type of cancer called leukemia and skin cancer have happened in people taking this drug for a long time. You will need to have regular check-ups. Your doctor will tell you how often to have these. Talk with the doctor.
- Avoid sun, sunlamps, and tanning beds. Use sunscreen and wear clothing and eyewear that protects you from the sun.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat a type of leukemia.
- It is used to treat cancer of the head and neck.
- It is used to treat sickle cell anemia.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

Oral solution:

- If you have been given this form of this drug, talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks. Talk with your doctor if you have questions or concerns about using this drug.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have any of these health problems: Anemia (other than sickle cell anemia) or wounds on the legs (leg ulcers).
- If you are taking any of these drugs: Didanosine or stavudine.
- If you are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed while you take this drug.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- You may have more chance of getting an infection. Wash hands often. Stay away from people with infections, colds, or flu.
- You may bleed more easily. Be careful and avoid injury. Use a soft toothbrush and an electric razor.
- This drug may affect certain lab tests. Tell all of your health care providers

and lab workers that you take this drug.

- Some of these drugs may affect certain continuous glucose monitors (CGM). False results of glucose tests may lead to low blood sugar. Talk with the doctor about the best way to monitor blood sugar.
- Talk with your doctor to see if you need to take folic acid while you are taking this drug.
- Talk with your doctor before getting any vaccines. Use of some vaccines with this drug may either raise the chance of an infection or make the vaccine not work as well.
- Severe pancreas, liver, and nerve problems have happened when this drug was taken with certain drugs used to treat HIV. Sometimes, this has been deadly. If you have questions. Talk with the doctor.
- If you have ever had or will be having radiation treatment, talk with your doctor. Worse side effects from radiation treatment have happened with this drug.
- Allergic reactions have happened with this drug. Sometimes, these have been very bad and people have had to go to the hospital. Talk with the doctor.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.
- This drug may affect sperm. This may affect being able to father a child. Talk with the doctor.
- This drug may cause harm to an unborn baby. A pregnancy test will be done before you start this drug to show that you are NOT pregnant.
- If you may become pregnant, use birth control while taking this drug. You will also need to use birth control for 6 months after your last dose unless you have been told otherwise. Be sure you know how long to use birth control. If you get pregnant, call your doctor right away.
- If your sex partner may become pregnant, use birth control while taking this drug. You will also need to use birth control for 1 year after your last dose unless you have been told otherwise. Be sure you know how long to use

birth control. If your partner gets pregnant, call the doctor right away.

What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Signs of hemolytic anemia like dark lips or urine, dizziness or passing out, feeling confused, feeling very tired or weak, pale skin, shortness of breath, or yellow skin or eyes.
- Change in color or size of a mole.
- A skin lump or growth.
- Change in skin or finger nails.
- Swelling in the arms or legs.
- Skin ulcers and dead body tissue (gangrene) has happened with this drug. Call your doctor right away if you have skin ulcers or any other skin changes.
- Some people have had lung problems with this drug. Sometimes, this has been deadly. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of lung problems like shortness of breath or other trouble breathing, cough that is new or worse, or fever.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Hair loss.

- Constipation, diarrhea, upset stomach, or decreased appetite.
- Headache.
- Mouth sores.
- Weight gain.
- Feeling dizzy, tired, or weak.
- Dry skin.
- Back, joint, arm, or leg pain.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

All products:

- Take this drug at the same time of day.
- Take with or without food.
- Take with a full glass of water.
- Keep taking this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.
- You will need to take special care when handling this drug. Check with the doctor or pharmacist to see how to handle this drug.
- Wear gloves when touching this drug or bottles with this drug in them. Wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling.

Capsules:

- Swallow whole. Do not chew, open, or crush.
- If the capsule is opened or broken, do not touch the contents. If the contents are touched or they get in the eyes, wash hands or eyes right away.

Tablets:

- The tablets may be split based on the dose that is needed. If splitting the tablets, only split on the score line.
- If you cannot swallow tablets, they can be dissolved in a small amount of water in a teaspoon. After mixing, take your dose right away. Do not store for future use.
- If a tablet is crushed, do not touch it. If a crushed tablet is touched or gets it in the eyes, wash hands or eyes right away.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

All products:

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Keep lid tightly closed.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

Capsules:

- You must handle and throw away this drug the right way. If powder from the capsule is spilled, wipe it up with a damp paper towel. Throw away the towel and the empty capsules in a closed holder, such as a plastic bag. Wash your hands fully.

Tablets:

- If you have split the tablets, store the smaller parts in the bottle. Use the smaller parts within 3 months.
- You must handle and throw away this drug the right way. If powder from a broken tablet is spilled, wipe it up with a damp paper towel. Throw away the towel in a closed holder, such as a plastic bag. Wash your hands fully.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. Check with your pharmacist. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic

and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

Last Reviewed Date

2025-11-25

Copyright

© 2026 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Hydroxyurea - Last updated on December 12, 2022
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center