PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Acetylcysteine

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

Acetadote

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat acetaminophen overdose.
- It is used to thin mucus in the lungs.
- It may be given to your child for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

What do I need to tell the doctor BEFORE my child takes this drug?

All products:

- If your child is allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell the doctor about the allergy and what signs your child had.
- If your child has asthma.

Liquid (when breathed in):

- If your child is taking any drugs that may lessen coughing. There are many drugs that can do this. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.

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

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

What are some things I need to know or do while my child takes this drug?

All products:

- Tell all of your child's health care providers that your child is taking this drug. This includes your child's doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Have your child's blood work and other lab tests checked as you have been told by the doctor.

If your child is pregnant or breast-feeding a baby:

- Talk with the doctor if your child is pregnant, becomes pregnant, or is breast-feeding a baby. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks to your child and the baby.

Injection or liquid:

- The drug may change color when the bottle is opened. This is normal and not a cause for concern.
- There may be a bad odor to this drug. This most often goes away fast.

Liquid (when breathed in):

- This drug makes mucus easier to cough up. Your child may have more mucus when first starting this drug. If your child is not able to cough up mucus, talk with the doctor about what to do.

Injection:

- If your child weighs less than 88 pounds (40 kilograms) or you have to watch how much fluid your child takes in, talk with your child's doctor. The chance of too much fluid in the body may be raised with this drug. Too much fluid in the body could lead to low blood sodium levels, seizures, and death.

What are some side effects that I need to call my child's 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 child's doctor or get medical help right away if your child has any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

All products:

- 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. Rarely, some allergic reactions have been deadly.
- Shortness of breath.

Liquid:

- Black, tarry, or bloody stools.
- Throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds.

Injection:

- Flushing.
- Severe dizziness or passing out.

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 child's doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother your child or do not go away:

All products:

- Upset stomach or throwing up.

Liquid (when breathed in):

- Runny nose.
- Feeling sleepy.
- Mouth irritation or mouth sores.
- Clammy skin.
- Fever.

Injection:

- Redness of the skin where this drug was given.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you

have questions about side effects, call your child's doctor. Call your child's doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

How is this drug best given?

Give this drug as ordered by your child's doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

Liquid (when breathed in):

- For breathing in only as a liquid (solution) by a special machine (nebulizer) into the lungs.
- If this drug is used with a face mask, your child's face may feel sticky after using. Wash your child's face with water.
- Do not use if the solution is leaking or has particles.
- Have your child drink lots of noncaffeine liquids unless told to drink less liquid by your child's doctor.

Liquid (when given by mouth or feeding tube):

- Mix with juice or soda and have your child drink.
- Give this drug within 1 hour of mixing.
- Have your child drink lots of noncaffeine liquids every day unless told to drink less liquid by your child's doctor.

- If your child throws up within 1 hour of taking this drug, give 1 more dose.
- Those who have feeding tubes may use this drug. Use as you have been told. Flush the feeding tube after this drug is given.

Injection:

- It is given as an infusion into a vein over a period of time.

What do I do if my child misses a dose?

Liquid:

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

Injection:

- Call your child's doctor to find out what to do.

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

Liquid:

- Store unopened vials at room temperature.
- Store opened vials in a refrigerator. Throw away any part not used after 4 days.
- Protect from light.

Injection:

- If you need to store this drug at home, talk with your child's doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.

All products:

- 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.

General drug facts

- If your child's symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your child's doctor.
- Do not share your child's drug with others and do not give anyone else's drug to your child.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your child's 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

2026-03-03

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.

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

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center