PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Corticotropin

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

Acthar; Acthar Gel; Cortrophin; Cortrophin Gel

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat MS (multiple sclerosis).
- It is used to treat infantile spasms.
- It is used for many health problems like allergy signs, asthma, adrenal gland problems, blood problems, skin rashes, or swelling problems. This is not a list of all health problems that this drug may be used for. Talk with the doctor.

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

For all patients taking 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 are allergic to pork products, talk with the doctor.
- If you have recently had surgery or if you have any of these health problems: Brittle bones, fungal infection, heart failure (weak heart), herpes infection of the eye, high blood pressure, poor adrenal function, scleroderma, or ulcer disease.

Children:

- If your child is younger than 2 years old and has an infection that happened before birth or during delivery.

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?

All products:

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Have your blood work checked as you have been told by your doctor. You may also need to have your eye pressure and bone density checked if you take this drug for a long time.
- If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), talk with your doctor. This drug may raise blood sugar.
- Check your blood sugar as you have been told by your doctor.
- High blood pressure has happened with this drug. Have your blood pressure checked as you have been told by your doctor.
- 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.
- You may need to lower how much salt is in your diet and take extra potassium. Talk with your doctor.
- This drug may affect allergy skin tests. Be sure your doctor and lab workers know you take this drug.

- Talk with your doctor before you drink alcohol.
- You may have more chance of getting an infection. Wash hands often. Stay away from people with infections, colds, or flu.
- Long-term use may raise the chance of cataracts or glaucoma. Talk with the doctor.
- This drug may cause weak bones (osteoporosis) with long-term use. Talk with your doctor to see if you have a higher chance of weak bones or if you have any questions.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had tuberculosis (TB). TB may become active again in patients taking this drug.
- Do not stop taking this drug all of a sudden without calling your doctor. You may have a greater risk of side effects. If you need to stop this drug, you will want to slowly stop it as ordered by your doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you have missed a dose or recently stopped this drug and you feel very tired, weak, or shaky, or have a fast heartbeat, confusion, sweating, or dizziness.
- This drug may affect growth in children and teens in some cases. They may need regular growth checks. Talk with the doctor.
- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if you take it while you are pregnant. If you are pregnant or you get pregnant while taking this drug, call your doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor if you are breast-feeding. You will need to talk about any risks to your baby.

SelfJect injector:

- This drug is not approved for use in children. Talk with the doctor.

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 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, or wound that will not heal.
- Signs of high blood sugar like confusion, feeling sleepy, unusual thirst or hunger, passing urine more often, flushing, fast breathing, or breath that smells like fruit.
- Signs of a weak adrenal gland like a severe upset stomach or throwing up, severe dizziness or passing out, muscle weakness, feeling very tired, mood changes, decreased appetite, or weight loss.
- Signs of Cushing's syndrome like weight gain in the upper back or belly, moon face, severe headache, or slow healing.
- Signs of high or low blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Signs of low potassium levels like muscle pain or weakness, muscle cramps, or a heartbeat that does not feel normal.
- Signs of a pancreas problem (pancreatitis) like very bad stomach pain, very bad back pain, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.
- Shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- Stomach pain.
- Black, tarry, or bloody stools.

- Throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds.
- Change in eyesight.
- Mental, mood, or behavior changes that are new or worse.
- Bone or joint pain.
- Seizures.

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:

- Diarrhea or constipation.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Increased appetite.
- Weight gain.
- Throwing up.
- Stuffy nose.
- Pimples (acne).
- Dizziness or headache.

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.

For infantile spasms (vials):

- It is given as a shot into a muscle.

For other uses (vials):

- It is given as a shot into a muscle or into the fatty part of the skin.

For all uses of this drug (vials):

- If you will be using this drug at home, your doctor or nurse will teach you how to use it.
- Before giving the shot, let it come to room temperature. Do not heat this drug.
- Wash your hands before and after use.
- Do not use if the solution is cloudy, leaking, or has particles.
- Do not use if solution changes color.
- Put back in the refrigerator right after each use.
- Throw away needles in a needle/sharp disposal box. Do not reuse needles or other items. When the box is full, follow all local rules for getting rid of it. Talk with a doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.

Prefilled syringes or SelfJect injector:

- It is given into the fatty part of the skin on the top of the thigh, belly area, or upper arm.
- If you will be using this drug at home, your doctor or nurse will teach you how to use it.
- Before using this drug, take it out of the refrigerator and leave it at room temperature for 45 minutes.

- Wash your hands before and after use.
- Do not use if the solution is cloudy, leaking, or has particles.
- Do not use if solution changes color.
- Move the site where you give the shot with each shot. Do not use the same site more than 1 time in a week.
- Do not give into a mole, scar, birthmark, or rash. Do not give into skin that is red, tattooed, irritated, burned, tender, bruised, hard, or damaged.
- Throw away after using. Do not use the device more than 1 time.
- Throw away needles in a needle/sharp disposal box. Do not reuse needles or other items. When the box is full, follow all local rules for getting rid of it. Talk with a doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.

SelfJect injector:

- Do not give into skin within 1 inch of the belly button, groin, or knee.

Prefilled syringes:

- Do not give into skin within 2 inches (5 cm) of the belly button.

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 in a refrigerator. Do not freeze.
- 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.

Cortrophin Vials:

- **1 mL vials:** Throw away any drug left in the vial 6 months after the first use. Do not use past the expiration date.
- **5 mL vials:** Throw away any drug left in the vial 28 days after the first use. Do not use past the expiration date.
- If needed, this drug can be left out at room temperature for up to 24 hours. Throw away drug if left at room temperature for more than 24 hours.

Prefilled syringes or SelfJect injector:

- If needed, this drug can be left out at room temperature for up to 24 hours. Throw away drug if left at room temperature for more than 24 hours.

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.

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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.

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