Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Dexmedetomidine

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

Igalmi; Precedex

Brand Names: Canada

Precedex

What is this drug used for?

Film:

- It is used to treat agitation.

Injection:

- It is used to help you relax during some procedures.
- It is used to cause sleep while on a ventilator.

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: Low blood pressure, low magnesium levels, low potassium levels, or heart problems like slow heartbeat or heart block.
- If you have ever been very dizzy or passed out.

- If you have ever had a long QT on ECG or other heartbeat that is not normal.
- If you are taking any drugs that can cause a certain type of heartbeat that is not normal (prolonged QT interval). 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 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.
- To lower the chance of feeling dizzy or passing out, rise slowly if you have been sitting or lying down. Be careful going up and down stairs.
- Talk with your doctor before you use alcohol, marijuana or other forms of cannabis, or prescription or OTC drugs that may slow your actions.
- The doctor will watch blood pressure, heart rate, and oxygen levels closely. Talk with the doctor.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, plan on getting pregnant, or are breast-feeding. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks to you and the baby.

Film:

- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert for at least 8 hours after you take this drug. Avoid these tasks or actions until you feel fully awake.
- Do not take this drug for longer than you were told by your doctor.
- Some people who used the injectable form of this drug had withdrawal signs when they stopped it. Most of the time this happened after taking it for up to 7 days. Some children had mild temporary withdrawal signs after short-term use. Tell the doctor if any bad effects happen after this drug is stopped.

Injection:

- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until the effects of this drug wear off and you feel fully awake.
- Low blood pressure and slow heartbeat have happened with this drug. Sometimes, these have been deadly. Talk with the doctor.

For a procedure:

- Some children had mild temporary withdrawal signs like confusion or agitation after short-term use. Tell the doctor if any bad effects happen after this drug is stopped.

For use while on a ventilator:

- Some people who got this drug for up to 7 days had withdrawal signs when this drug was stopped. This includes upset stomach, throwing up, agitation, fast heartbeat, or signs of high blood pressure like severe headache. Tell your doctor if you have any bad effects after this drug is stopped.

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:

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.
- Fast, slow, or abnormal heartbeat.
- Chest pain or pressure.

Film:

- Severe dizziness or passing out.

Injection:

- Signs of high or low blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Signs of high sodium levels like thirst, feeling irritable, feeling very tired or weak, twitching, seizures, or passing out.
- Passing urine more often.
- Fever.
- Trouble breathing, slow breathing, or shallow breathing.
- Fast breathing.
- Call your doctor right away if you have any of these signs within 48 hours after getting this drug: Confusion, constipation, diarrhea, dizziness, feeling agitated or nervous, headache, salt cravings, stomach pain, sweating,

weakness, or weight loss.

For use while on a ventilator:

- Signs of low potassium levels like muscle pain or weakness, muscle cramps, or a heartbeat that does not feel normal.
- Signs of high or low blood sugar like breath that smells like fruit, dizziness, fast breathing, fast heartbeat, feeling confused, feeling sleepy, feeling weak, flushing, headache, unusual thirst or hunger, passing urine more often, shaking, or sweating.
- Feeling agitated.
- Feeling nervous and excitable.
- Swelling in the arms or legs.

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:

Film:

- Feeling sleepy.
- Upset stomach.
- Numbness or tingling in the mouth.
- Dizziness.
- Dry mouth.

Injection:

- Upset stomach.

For a procedure:

- Dry mouth.

For use while on a ventilator:

- Constipation.

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.

Film:

- Put film under the tongue or behind the lower lip. Close your mouth and let the film dissolve.
- Do not chew or swallow whole.
- If using under the tongue, do not eat or drink anything for at least 15 minutes after taking this drug. If using behind the lower lip, do not eat or drink anything for at least 1 hour after taking this drug.

Injection:

- It is given into a vein for a period of time.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- This drug will be given on an as needed basis in a health care setting.

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

- This drug will be given to you in a hospital or doctor's office. You will not store it at home.

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.
- 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.
- 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

2026-05-22

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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.

Dexmedetomidine - Last updated on December 12, 2022
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