Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Promethazine and Codeine

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.

Warning
For all patients taking this drug:

- This drug has an opioid drug in it. Opioid drugs can put you at risk for drug use disorder. Misuse or abuse of this drug can lead to overdose and death. If you have questions, talk with your doctor.
- Severe breathing problems may happen with this drug. These breathing problems can be deadly. Watch for breathing problems, especially when you first start taking this drug. Call your doctor right away if you have slow, shallow, or trouble breathing.
- Even one dose of this drug may be deadly if it is taken by someone else or by accident, especially in children. If this drug is taken by someone else or by accident, get medical help right away.

- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Severe side effects have happened when opioid drugs were used with benzodiazepines, alcohol, marijuana, other forms of cannabis, or street drugs. This includes severe drowsiness, breathing problems, and death. Benzodiazepines include drugs like alprazolam, diazepam, and lorazepam. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- Many drugs interact with this drug and can raise the chance of side effects like deadly breathing problems. Talk with your doctor and pharmacist to make sure it is safe to use this drug with all of your drugs.
- Avoid alcohol, marijuana or other forms of cannabis, or prescription or OTC drugs that may slow your actions.
- Get medical help right away if you feel very sleepy, very dizzy, or if you pass out. Caregivers or others need to get medical help right away if the patient does not respond, does not answer or react like normal, or will not wake up.
- Be sure that you know how to measure your dose. Dosing errors can lead to accidental overdose and

death. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or pharmacist.

- Do not take if you are pregnant.
- If you are pregnant or plan to get pregnant, talk with your doctor right away about the benefits and risks of using this drug during pregnancy. Using this drug for a long time during pregnancy may lead to withdrawal in the newborn baby. Withdrawal in the newborn can be life-threatening if not treated.

Children:

- This drug is not approved for use in children. Severe and sometimes deadly breathing problems have happened with codeine in children. Most often, this happened after surgery to remove tonsils or adenoids and in children who were rapid metabolizers of codeine. Do not give to a child younger than 12 years of age. Do not give to a child younger than 18 years of age who is very overweight, has certain health problems like sleep apnea or other lung or breathing problems, or has had surgery to remove tonsils or adenoids. If your child has been given this drug, ask the doctor about the benefits and risks.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to relieve coughing.
- It is used to ease allergy signs.
- It is used to ease cold signs.

Children:

- This drug is not for use in children younger than 18 years of age. The benefits of taking this drug for a cough due to allergies, a cold, or other infection do not outweigh the risks in children. If your child has been given this drug or if you have any questions, talk with your child's doctor.

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: Lung or breathing problems like asthma, trouble breathing, or sleep apnea; high levels of carbon dioxide in the blood; or stomach or bowel block or narrowing.
- If you have a cough with a lot of mucus, a long-term cough caused by smoking or being around smoke, or lung problems like asthma or emphysema.

- If you have had a recent head injury, brain injury or tumor, or raised pressure in the brain.
- If you have taken certain drugs for depression or Parkinson's disease in the last 14 days. This includes isocarboxazid, phenelzine, tranylcypromine, selegiline, or rasagiline. Very high blood pressure may happen.
- If you are taking any of these drugs: Linezolid or methylene blue.
- If you have been told by your doctor that you are a rapid metabolizer of some drugs.
- 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.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until you see how this drug affects you.
- 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.
- Do not take more than what your doctor told you to take. Do not take more often or for longer than you were told. Doing any of these things may raise the chance of severe side effects.
- Do not take this drug with other strong pain drugs or if you are using a pain patch without talking to your doctor first.
- Long-term or regular use of this drug may lead to dependence. Stopping this drug all of a sudden may lead to signs of withdrawal. Talk to your doctor before you lower the dose or stop this drug. You will need to follow your doctor's instructions. Tell your doctor if you have any bad effects.

- This drug may raise the chance of seizures in some people, including people who have had seizures in the past. Talk to your doctor to see if you have a greater chance of seizures while taking this drug.
- If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), you will need to watch your blood sugar closely.
- This drug may cause the results of some pregnancy tests to be wrong. Talk with the doctor.
- This drug may affect certain lab tests. Tell all of your health care providers and lab workers that you take this drug.
- This drug may make you sunburn more easily. Use care if you will be in the sun. Tell your doctor if you sunburn easily while taking this drug.
- Taking an opioid drug like this drug may lead to a rare but severe adrenal gland problem. Call your doctor right away if you feel very tired or weak, you pass out, or you have severe dizziness, very upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.
- Long-term use of an opioid drug may lead to lower sex hormone levels. Call your doctor if you have a lowered interest in sex, fertility problems, no menstrual period, or ejaculation problems.
- A severe and sometimes deadly problem called

serotonin syndrome may happen if you take this drug with certain other drugs. Call your doctor right away if you have agitation; change in balance; confusion; hallucinations; fever; fast or abnormal heartbeat; flushing; muscle twitching or stiffness; seizures; shivering or shaking; sweating a lot; severe diarrhea, upset stomach, or throwing up; or severe headache.

- A very bad and sometimes deadly health problem called neuroleptic malignant syndrome (NMS) may happen. Call your doctor right away if you have any fever, muscle cramps or stiffness, dizziness, very bad headache, confusion, change in thinking, fast heartbeat, heartbeat that does not feel normal, or are sweating a lot.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.

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 high or low blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Signs of low blood sugar like dizziness, headache, feeling sleepy, feeling weak, shaking, a fast heartbeat, confusion, hunger, or sweating.
- Signs of a pancreas problem (pancreatitis) like very bad stomach pain, very bad back pain, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.
- Trouble breathing, slow breathing, or shallow breathing.
- Noisy breathing.
- Breathing problems during sleep (sleep apnea).
- Severe constipation or stomach pain. These may be signs of a severe bowel problem.
- Feeling confused.
- Chest pain or pressure, a fast heartbeat, or an abnormal heartbeat.
- Trouble passing urine.
- Pain when passing urine or blood in urine.
- Yellow skin or eyes.

- Trouble controlling body movements, twitching, change in balance, trouble swallowing or speaking.
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there).
- Depression or other mood changes.
- Restlessness.
- Ringing in ears.
- Seizures.
- Any unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Change in eyesight.
- Swelling in the arms or legs.
- Low white blood cell counts have rarely happened with this drug. This may lead to a higher chance of getting an infection. Tell your doctor if you have ever had a low white blood cell count. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of infection like fever, chills, or sore throat.

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:

- Feeling dizzy, sleepy, tired, or weak.

- Feeling nervous and excitable.
- Constipation, diarrhea, stomach pain, upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.
- Heartburn.
- Dry mouth.
- Headache.
- Flushing.
- Sweating a lot.

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.

- Take by mouth only.
- Take with or without food. Take with food if it causes an

upset stomach.

- Measure liquid doses carefully. Use the measuring device that comes with this drug. If there is none, ask the pharmacist for a device to measure this drug.
- Do not use a household teaspoon or tablespoon to measure this drug. Doing so could lead to the dose being too high.
- Do not inject or snort this drug. Doing any of these things can cause very bad side effects like trouble breathing and death from overdose.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- If you take this drug on a regular basis, 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.
- Many times this drug is taken on an as needed basis. Do not take more often than told by the doctor.

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

- Store at room temperature protected from light. Store in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Protect from heat.

- Store this drug in a safe place where children cannot see or reach it, and where other people cannot get to it. A locked box or area may help keep this drug safe. Keep all drugs away from 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 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.
- This drug comes with an extra patient fact sheet called a Medication Guide. Read it with care. Read it again each time this drug is refilled. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with the doctor, 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

2024-01-18

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.

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