Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Ruxolitinib (Topical

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

Opzelura

Brand Names: Canada

Opzelura

Warning

- Severe infections have happened in people taking drugs like this one by mouth to treat inflammatory health problems. This includes tuberculosis, viral infections like shingles, bacterial infections, and fungal infections. Sometimes these may lead to treatment in a hospital or death. If you have an infection, talk with your doctor. You may need to avoid using this drug.
- Drugs like this one taken by mouth to treat inflammatory health problems may raise the risk of heart attack, stroke, blood clots, and death. This includes sudden death from heart disease. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- Lymphoma and other types of cancer have happened in people taking drugs like this one by mouth to treat inflammatory health problems. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you smoke, have smoked in the past, or have ever had a heart attack, other heart problems, stroke, or blood clot.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat eczema. This drug must only be used when other drugs cannot be used or have not worked.
- It is used to treat a certain type of vitiligo (a skin problem that causes lighter patches of skin).

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 a large area needs to be treated.
- If you have had hepatitis B or C, talk with your doctor.

- If you may have a higher risk for blood clots.
- If you are using another drug like this one. If you are not sure, ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- If you are taking any drugs used to suppress your immune system like azathioprine or cyclosporine. There are many drugs that can do this. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.
- If you take any drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) that must not be taken with this drug, like certain drugs that are used for HIV, infections, seizures, and others. There are many drugs that must not be taken with this drug.
- If you are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed while you use this drug and for 4 weeks after the last dose.

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.
- Do not use more than what your doctor told you to use. Do not use more often or longer than what you were told. Doing any of these things may raise the chance of very bad side effects.
- You may need a TB (tuberculosis) test before starting this drug.
- Have your blood work and other lab tests checked as you have been told by your doctor.
- If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), you will need to watch your blood

sugar closely. Low blood sugar was seen in people with diabetes who were taking the oral form of this drug.

- High cholesterol and triglyceride levels have happened with the oral form of this drug. If you have high cholesterol or triglycerides, talk with your doctor.
- Have your skin checked. Tell your doctor if you have any skin changes like a new wart, skin sore or reddish bump that bleeds or does not heal, or a change in the color or size of a mole.
- Avoid sun, sunlamps, and tanning beds. Use sunscreen and wear clothing and eyewear that protects you from the sun.
- This drug may lower the ability of the bone marrow to make blood cells that the body needs. If blood cell counts get very low, this can lead to bleeding problems, infections, or anemia. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- 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.
- Use this drug with care in children. They may have more side effects. Talk with the doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan on getting pregnant. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks of using this drug while you are pregnant.

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 bleeding like throwing up or coughing up blood; vomit that looks like coffee grounds; blood in the urine; black, red, or tarry stools; bleeding from the gums; abnormal vaginal bleeding; bruises without a cause or that get bigger; or bleeding you cannot stop.
- Feeling very tired or weak.
- Call your doctor right away if you have a swollen gland, night sweats, shortness of breath, or weight loss without trying.
- Call your doctor right away if you have fever, chills, or sweating; cough; muscle aches; shortness of breath; more sputum or change in color of sputum; red, warm, swollen, painful skin; sores on your body; weight loss; stomach pain; diarrhea; burning or pain with passing urine; passing urine more often; or feeling very tired.
- Call your doctor or get medical help right away if you have signs of heart attack or stroke. This includes chest pain or pressure, shortness of breath, dizziness or passing out, severe headache, weakness on 1 side of the body, trouble speaking or thinking, change in eyesight or balance, or drooping on 1 side of the face.
- Call your doctor right away if you have signs of a blood clot like chest pain or pressure; coughing up blood; shortness of breath; swelling, warmth, numbness, change of color, or pain in a leg or arm; or trouble speaking or swallowing.

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:

- Nose or throat irritation.
- Signs of a common cold.
- Pain or irritation where this drug is used.

For patients with vitiligo:

- Itching, redness, or acne (pimples) where this drug is used.
- 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.

- Do not take this drug by mouth. Use on your skin only. Keep out of your mouth, nose, and eyes (may burn).
- Do not put in the vagina.
- Put a thin layer on the affected skin.
- Wash your hands before and after use. If your hand is the treated area, do not wash your hand after use.
- Do not use coverings (bandages, dressings) unless told to do so by the doctor.

For patients with eczema:

- Stop this drug when health problem is gone.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Put on 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 put on 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

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

- Store at room temperature.
- 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 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

2026-08-14

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.

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