Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Salmeterol

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

Serevent Diskus

Brand Names: Canada

Serevent Diskus

Warning

- Drugs like this one may raise the chance of asthma-related deaths in people with asthma who do **not** also use an inhaled steroid. It appears that this effect does not apply to people with COPD. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- Drugs like this one may raise the chance of asthma-related hospital stays in children and teenagers with asthma who do **not** also use an inhaled steroid. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- Do not use this drug to treat asthma if you are **not** also using an inhaled steroid. Do not use this drug to treat asthma if your asthma is well controlled by an inhaled steroid.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat asthma.
- It is used to treat COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).
- It is used to prevent breathing problems that happen with exercise.
- Do not use this drug to treat intense flare-ups of shortness of breath. Use a rescue inhaler (quick relief inhaler). If you have questions, talk with the 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 a milk allergy.
- If you are using another drug like this one. If you are not sure, ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- If you are taking any of these drugs: Atazanavir, clarithromycin, indinavir, itraconazole, ketoconazole, nefazodone, nelfinavir, ritonavir, saquinavir, or telithromycin.

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.
- If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), this drug may sometimes raise blood sugar. Talk with your doctor about how to keep your blood sugar under control.
- Check your blood pressure as you have been told.
- To help control and improve your breathing problem, it is important that you do not run out of this drug. Be sure to get a refill before you run out.
- Call your doctor right away if your breathing problems get worse, if your rescue inhaler (quick relief inhaler) does not work as well, or if you need to use your rescue inhaler more often.
- Do not take more of this drug or use it more often than you have been told. Deaths have happened when too much of this type of drug has been taken. Talk with your 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.

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 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 low potassium levels like muscle pain or weakness, muscle cramps, or a heartbeat that does not feel normal.
- Signs of high or low blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Chest pain or pressure, a fast heartbeat, or an abnormal heartbeat.
- Very nervous and excitable.
- Shakiness.
- Fever.
- Seizures.
- Severe upset stomach or throwing up.
- Feeling very tired or weak.
- Trouble sleeping.
- This drug can cause very bad breathing problems right after you take a dose. Sometimes, this may be life-threatening. If you have trouble breathing, breathing that is worse, wheezing, or coughing after using this drug, use a rescue inhaler (quick relief inhaler) and get medical help right away.

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:

- Headache.
- Nose or throat irritation.
- Flu-like signs.

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 breathing in only by an inhaler into the lungs.
- Keep using this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.
- Always use the device in a level, flat position.
- Do not take the device apart or wash it. Do not use it with a spacer. Do not breathe out into the device.
- Do not take an extra dose, even if you did not taste or feel the powder.
- Close the device after each dose. Do not open the device unless a dose is being used.
- If using to prevent exercise-induced breathing problems, use at least 30 minutes before exercise. Do not take another dose for at least 12 hours.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.
- Do not use more than 2 doses a day.

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

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Store in foil pouch until ready for use.
- This inhaler has a dose counter to keep track of how many doses are left. Throw away the inhaler when the dose counter reaches “0”, 6 weeks after opening the foil container, or after the expiration date, whichever comes first.
- Protect from heat and sunlight.
- 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

2023-10-05

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.

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