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.

Prefilled syringes or SelfJect injector:

- This form of this drug is not approved for use in children. However, your child's doctor may decide the benefits of taking this drug outweigh the risks. If your child has been given this form of this drug, ask your child's doctor for information about the benefits and risks. Talk with your child's doctor if you have questions about this drug.

What do I need to tell the doctor BEFORE my child takes this drug?

- If your child is allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell the doctor about the allergy and what signs your child had.

- If your child is allergic to pork products, talk with the doctor.
- If your child has recently had surgery or if your child has 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.
- 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 the doctor and pharmacist about all of your child's drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe to give this drug with all of your child's other drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug your child takes without checking with the doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while my child takes this drug?

- Tell all of your child's health care providers that your child is taking this drug. This includes your child's doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Have your child's blood work checked as you have been told by the doctor. Your child may also need to have eye pressure and bone density checked if this drug is used for a long time.
- If your child has high blood sugar (diabetes), talk with the doctor. This drug can raise blood sugar.
- Check your child's blood sugar as you have been told by the doctor.
- High blood pressure has happened with this drug. Have your child's blood pressure checked as you have been told by the doctor.
- Talk with the doctor before your child gets any vaccines. Use of some vaccines with this drug may either raise the chance of very bad infection or make the vaccine not work as well.
- You may need to lower how much salt is in your child's diet and give your

child extra potassium. Talk with your child's doctor.

- This drug may affect allergy skin tests. Be sure the doctor and lab workers know your child takes this drug.
- Alcohol may interact with this drug. Be sure your child does not drink alcohol.
- Your child may have more chance of getting infections. Have your child wash hands often. Avoid crowds and people with infections, colds, or flu.
- Long-term use may raise the chance of cataracts, glaucoma, or weak bones (osteoporosis). Talk with your child's doctor.
- Tell the doctor if your child has ever had tuberculosis (TB). TB may become active again in patients taking this drug.
- Do not stop giving this drug to your child all of a sudden without calling the doctor. Your child may have a greater risk of side effects. If your child needs to stop this drug, you will want to slowly stop it as told by the doctor.
- Tell the doctor if your child has missed a dose or recently stopped this drug and feels very tired, weak, or shaky, or has 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.

If your child is breast-feeding a baby:

- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if your child takes it during pregnancy. If your child is pregnant or gets pregnant while taking this drug, call the doctor right away.
- Tell the doctor if your child is breast-feeding a baby. You will need to talk about any risks to the baby.

What are some side effects that I need to call my child's 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 child's doctor or get medical help right away if your child has 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.
- Change in eyesight.
- Stomach pain.

- Black, tarry, or bloody stools.
- Throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds.
- 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 child's doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother your child 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 child's doctor. Call your child's doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

How is this drug best given?

Give this drug as ordered by your child's 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 reasons:

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

For all uses of this drug:

- If you will be giving your child the shot, your child's doctor or nurse will teach you how to give the shot.
- 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.

What do I do if my child misses a dose?

- Give a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your child's next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your child's normal time.
- Do not give 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

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

- 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.

General drug facts

- If your child's symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your child's doctor.
- Do not share your child's drug with others and do not give anyone else's drug to your child.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your child's 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

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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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