

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Theophylline

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

Elixophyllin; Theo-24

Brand Names: Canada

AA-Theo LA; Theo ER

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat breathing problems.
- Do not use this drug to treat intense flare-ups of shortness of breath. Use a rescue inhaler. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.

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 taking St. John's wort. Do not give St. John's wort with this drug. If your child has been taking St. John's wort, talk with the doctor before you stop giving it to your child.

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?

All products:

- 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.
- This drug may affect certain lab tests. Tell all of your child's health care providers and lab workers that your child takes this drug.

- Have your child wear disease medical alert ID (identification).
- Have your child's blood work and other lab tests checked as you have been told by the doctor.
- If your child has high blood sugar (diabetes), you will need to watch your child's blood sugar closely.
- Limit your child's use of caffeine and chocolate. Use with this drug may cause nervousness, shakiness, and a fast heartbeat.
- Alcohol may interact with this drug. Be sure your child does not drink alcohol.
- Tobacco and marijuana may interact with this drug. Be sure your child does not smoke tobacco or marijuana.
- If your child gets sick, has a fever, or has a long-term illness that gets worse, talk with the doctor.
- If the patient is a child, use this drug with care. The risk of some side effects may be higher in children.

If your child is pregnant or breast-feeding a baby:

- Talk with the doctor if your child is pregnant, becomes pregnant, or is breast-feeding a baby. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks to your child and the baby.

Extended-release tablets:

- For some brands, you or your child may see the tablet shell in your child's stool. For these brands, this is normal and not a cause for concern. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.

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 low potassium levels like muscle pain or weakness, muscle cramps, or a heartbeat that does not feel normal.
- 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 too much acid in the blood (acidosis) like confusion; fast breathing; fast heartbeat; a heartbeat that does not feel normal; very bad stomach pain, upset stomach, or throwing up; feeling very sleepy; shortness of breath; or feeling very tired or weak.
- Abnormal heartbeat.
- Severe dizziness or passing out.
- Shakiness.
- Feeling confused.
- Seizures.
- Change in the way your child acts.
- Feeling irritable.
- Muscle spasm.
- Muscle pain or weakness, dark urine, or trouble passing urine.
- Tell the doctor if your child has upset stomach, throwing up, headache that does not go away, trouble sleeping, or fast heartbeat.

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:

- Feeling nervous and excitable.
- Restlessness.
- Headache.
- Diarrhea.
- Passing urine more often.

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.

All products:

- Give this drug at the same time of day.
- Some foods may change how this drug works or raise the chance of side effects. Talk with the doctor about how to give this drug with food.

All extended-release products:

- Have your child swallow whole. Do not let your child chew, break, or crush.
- Give in the morning if giving once a day. Do not give it at night unless told to do so by the doctor.

Extended-release tablets:

- Some tablets may have a score line. If needed, these tablets may be split on the score line.

Liquid:

- 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.

What do I do if my child misses a 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 at room temperature protected from light. Store in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- 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.

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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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