Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Dexamethasone (Systemic

This information from Lexicomp® 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

Baycadron™; Decadron® [DSC]; Dexamethasone Intensol™; DexPak® 10 Day TaperPak®; DexPak® 13 Day TaperPak®; DexPak® 6 Day TaperPak®

Brand Names: Canada

APO-Dexamethasone; Dexamethasone Omega Unidose; Dexamethasone-Omega; Odan-Dexamethasone; PMS-Dexamethasone; PMS-Dexamethasone Sod Phosphat [DSC]

What is this drug used for?

- 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.

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: A fungal infection or malaria infection in the brain.

- If you have a herpes infection of the eye.
- If you have nerve problems in the eye.

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?

All products:

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Have your blood work and bone density checked as you have been told by your doctor.
- This drug may affect certain lab tests. Tell all of your health care providers and lab workers that you take this drug.
- If you have been taking this drug for many weeks, talk with your doctor before stopping. You may want to slowly stop this drug.
- Tell your doctor if you have missed a dose or recently stopped this drug and you feel very tired, weak, or shaky, or have a fast heartbeat, confusion, sweating, or dizziness.
- You may have more chance of getting an infection. Wash hands often. Stay away from people with infections, colds, or flu.
- Call your doctor right away if you have any signs of infection like fever, chills, flu-like signs, very bad sore throat, ear or sinus pain, cough, more sputum or change in color of sputum, pain with passing urine, mouth sores, or a wound that will not heal.
- Chickenpox and measles can be very bad or even deadly in some people

taking steroid drugs like this drug. Avoid being near anyone with chickenpox or measles if you have not had these health problems before. If you have been exposed to chickenpox or measles, talk with your doctor.

- High blood pressure has happened with drugs like this one. Have your blood pressure checked as you have been told by your doctor.
- Long-term use may raise the chance of cataracts or glaucoma. Talk with the doctor.
- Have your eye pressure checked if you are on this drug for a long time. Talk with your doctor.
- This drug may cause weak bones (osteoporosis) with long-term use. Talk with your doctor to see if you have a higher chance of weak bones or if you have any questions.
- Talk with your doctor before getting any vaccines. Use of some vaccines with this drug may either raise the chance of an infection or make the vaccine not work as well.
- If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), you will need to watch your blood sugar closely.
- Talk with your doctor before you drink alcohol.
- A type of cancer (Kaposi’s sarcoma) has happened in people taking drugs like this one for a long time. Talk with the 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.
- If you used this drug when you were pregnant, tell your baby’s doctor.

Injection:

- If you are allergic to sulfites, talk with your doctor. Some products have sulfites.
- Very bad health problems have happened when drugs like this one have been given into the spine (epidural). These include paralysis, loss of eyesight, stroke, and sometimes death. It is not known if drugs like this one are safe and effective when given into the spine. These drugs are not approved for this use. Talk with the doctor.

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:

All products:

- 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 a pancreas problem (pancreatitis) like very bad stomach pain, very bad back pain, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.
- Signs of high blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- 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 disease like weight gain in the upper back or belly, moon face, very bad headache, or slow healing.

- 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.
- Shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- Skin changes (pimples, stretch marks, slow healing, hair growth).
- Fast, slow, or abnormal heartbeat.
- Chest pain or pressure.
- Swelling, warmth, numbness, change of color, or pain in a leg or arm.
- Period (menstrual) changes.
- Bone or joint pain.
- Muscle pain or weakness.
- Change in eyesight.
- Change in the way you act.
- Depression or other mood changes.
- Seizures.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Any unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Severe stomach pain.
- Black, tarry, or bloody stools.
- Throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds.

Injection:

- Irritation where the shot is given.

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:

- Upset stomach or throwing up.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Restlessness.
- Sweating a lot.
- Hair thinning.
- Headache.
- Feeling dizzy, tired, or weak.
- Weight gain.
- Increased appetite.
- Hiccups.

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.

All oral products:

- Take in the morning if taking once a day.
- Take with food to prevent an upset stomach.
- Keep taking this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.
- If you take cholestyramine, you may need to take it at some other time than this drug. Talk with your pharmacist.

All liquid products:

- Make sure you have the right liquid; there is more than one strength.
- 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.

Liquid (concentrate):

- Only use the measuring device that comes with this drug.
- Mix the liquid with water, juice, soda, applesauce, or pudding before taking it.
- After mixing, take your dose right away. Do not store for future use.

Injection:

- It is given as a shot.

All products:

- You may need to lower how much salt is in your diet and take extra potassium. Talk with your doctor.
- This drug lowers how much natural steroid your body makes. Tell your doctor if you have fever, infection, surgery, or injury. Your body’s normal response to these stresses may be affected. You may need extra doses of steroid.
- This drug may affect allergy skin tests. Be sure your doctor and lab workers know you take this drug.
- This drug may affect growth in children and teens in some cases. They may need regular growth checks. Talk with the doctor.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

All oral products:

- 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.

Injection:

- Call your doctor to find out what to do.

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

All oral products:

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.

All liquid products:

- Do not freeze.

Liquid (concentrate):

- Throw away any part not used 90 days after opening.

Injection:

- If you need to store this drug at home, talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.

All products:

- 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.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. Check with your pharmacist. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your 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 any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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