

Dexamethasone

Names	The generic drug name is dexamethasone (dex-a-METH-a-sone). Decadron® is a brand name. There may be other names for this medication.
How is it Administered?	Dexamethasone may be taken by mouth (tablets or liquid) or given as an injection into a vein (IV), a muscle (IM), or a joint (intraarticular). It can also be applied locally to the eyes (drops) or to the skin (lotion).
Why Am I Taking Dexamethasone?	Dexamethasone reduces swelling (inflammation), increases appetite, and decreases nausea/vomiting caused by cancer treatment. It may reverse allergic reactions, treat certain types of cancer, prevent transplant rejection, lower blood calcium, and increase feelings of energy and well-being.
How Does it Work?	<p>Your adrenal glands (located atop the kidneys) produce hormones called corticosteroids. These hormones regulate the day-to-day functions of your cells (metabolism), help keep fluids and electrolytes in balance, and affect your cardiovascular, nervous, endocrine, and immune systems.</p> <p>Dexamethasone is a man-made (synthetic) version of a corticosteroid, a natural anti-inflammatory hormone. It reduces/prevents your body's normal immune/inflammatory response (redness, heat, swelling, and pain). While on this medication, you may get infections more easily, and it may be harder to get rid of an infection you already have.</p>
What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin?	<p>Tell your doctor if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• are allergic to dexamethasone, aspirin, tartrazine (a yellow dye in some processed foods and drugs), or any foods, etc.• have a fungal infection• have or have ever had liver, kidney, intestinal, or heart disease; diabetes; thyroid problems, high blood pressure; mental illness; myasthenia gravis; osteoporosis; herpes eye infection; seizures; tuberculosis (TB); or ulcers• are pregnant or breastfeeding <p>This drug may interact with others or cause harmful side effects. To help prevent problems, tell your doctor and pharmacist about your health problems and about <u>all</u> the prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal/diet supplements you are taking</p>

What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Increased appetite and/or weight gain
- Heartburn or nausea
- Sleep problems; mood changes (restlessness, anxiety, depression, irritability); increased or decreased energy; shakiness or tremors
- Skin changes: acne, fragile or “thin” skin (poor wound healing), easy bruising, increased hair growth
- Headache and/or dizziness
- High blood sugar or worsening pre-existing diabetes, high triglycerides (fats in the blood), and/or high salt levels (excess salt may lead to swelling, high blood pressure, weight gain, and heart problems)
- Excess fluid or swelling in the face, hands, or feet
- Irregular or absent menstrual periods
- Slow wound healing
- Muscle weakness

How Can I Manage These Side Effects?

- Take your medication with food or milk to decrease stomach irritation.
- Ask your doctor about medication to help prevent stomach problems and headaches, or if feel you need help with mood or sleep changes.
- Do not use any products on your acne, rash, or skin problems unless approved by your doctor.
- Be careful handling sharp objects, stay away from situations where you could be injured, and use an electric razor.
- If you have diabetes, test your blood or urine more frequently than usual. Call your doctor if your blood sugar is high or if sugar is present in your urine.
- Your doctor may instruct you to follow a low salt (sodium), potassium-rich, or high-protein diet and/or weigh yourself every day.

When Should I Call the Doctor?

Call your doctor immediately if you have:

- any sign of infection: fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, chills, cough, sore throat, pain or burning upon urination; redness or tenderness along a vein, at an IV site, or at any other wound or skin irritation
- any sign of an allergic reaction: itching or hives, swelling in your face or hands, swelling or tingling in your mouth or throat, chest tightness, trouble breathing, dizziness, or palpitations
- vision problems or changes in vision
- muscle weakness

When Should I
Call the Doctor?
(cont)

- unusual bruising or bleeding: bleeding lasts more than 10-15 minutes or that causes dizziness; black or bloody stools; vomit that is bloody or that looks like coffee grounds; blood in your urine or phlegm /mucus, unusually heavy menstrual bleeding, spontaneous bleeding from your gums or nose, or superficial bleeding into the skin that appears as a rash of pinpoint-sized reddish-purple spots (petechiae)

Call your doctor as soon as possible if you have:

- nausea not relieved by prescribed medication or that prevents you from eating or drinking; weight gain/loss of 5 lbs in a week
- headache unrelieved by prescribed medication
- a skin wound that isn't healing or a rash or acne that is bothersome

What Else Do I
Need to Know
About
Dexamethasone?

- Do not suddenly stop using this medicine. Your doctor will supervise a slow tapering off of your medication.
- This drug may increase your risk of getting an infection and decrease your ability to fight it off. For example, you may get an infection but not a fever. Fevers are a natural response; an attempt to kill the invader. Stay away from people with colds/infections, wash your hands often, and talk to your doctor before you have any vaccinations or flu shots. If you are exposed to chickenpox or measles, tell your doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor if you have an increased, unusual stress level.
- Use effective birth control. This drug may harm a fetus.
- Long term use and/or high doses may cause osteoporosis (thinning bones/increased risk of fracture) particularly in smokers, the elderly, postmenopausal women, and people with diabetes or lung problems
- Your stomach may become more sensitive to alcohol, aspirin, and certain arthritis medications, which increases your risk of ulcers.
- Have regular eye exams; dexamethasone has been linked to glaucoma (high pressure in the eye) and cataracts
- Store the medicine away from heat, moisture, and direct light.
- Carry an identification card that indicates that you may need to take supplementary doses (write down the full dose you took before gradually decreasing it) of dexamethasone during periods of stress (injuries, infections, and severe asthma attacks). Ask your pharmacist or doctor how to obtain this card.
- Tell all your doctors/dentists that you are using dexamethasone.
- If you would like more information, talk to your doctor.