

Dexamethasone

Information for patients and carers from the Haematology Department

Why have I been prescribed Dexamethasone?

Usually, you are prescribed this because your platelet count is very low, you have bleeding symptoms, or you have a planned procedure, operation, or dentistry and need to increase your platelet count for this.

Dexamethasone is an immunosuppressant drug; it works by preventing your immune system from destroying your platelets. They do this by reducing the level of antibodies in your blood stream and usually start working within a few days of beginning taking them.

How do I take the medication?

We give Dexamethasone as a tablet, usually in 20mg or 40mg doses. It is given in a 'short sharp burst' over a four day period. The drug comes in 2mg tablets, which means taking either 10 or 20 tablets each day for the four days. It will clearly state on your prescription what dose you should take and when.

When do I take my medication if it is for an operation or procedure?

If we need to give you Dexamethasone before a medical procedure, surgery, or dentistry, this will usually be around seven days beforehand. You may be asked to have a blood test locally (such as at your GP surgery) or at the hospital, to check to see that the drug has worked.



What are the possible side effects of Dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone is a steroid drug, and taking these drugs in short sharp bursts can often minimize their side effects. There can be numerous side effects with Dexamethasone but this treatment is usually fairly well tolerated by patients.

Dexamethasone can cause serious mental health problems. These are common in both adults and children. They can affect about one in every 20 people taking Dexamethasone and can include the following.

- Feeling depressed, including thinking about suicide.
- Feeling high (mania) or having moods that go up and down.
- Feeling anxious, having problems sleeping, difficulty in thinking, or being confused and losing your memory.
- Feeling, seeing, or hearing things that do not exist.
- Having strange and frightening thoughts.
- Changing how you act or feelings of being alone

If you notice any of these problems, talk to a doctor straightaway.

An allergic reaction may include:

- any kind of skin rash or itching of the skin; or
- difficulty in breathing or collapsing.

If you get any of the following side effects see your doctor as soon as possible.

- Stomach and gut problems: stomach ulcers, which may perforate or bleed, indigestion, feeling sick (nausea), or being sick (vomiting). You will be given medication to reduce this risk.
- Problems with salts in your blood, such as too much sodium or low potassium or calcium. You experience some water retention but your doctor will monitor this through blood tests if necessary.
- Heart and blood problems: high blood pressure, blood clots, problems with the muscles in your heart after a recent heart attack.
- Bone problems: thinning of the bones (osteoporosis) with an increased risk of fractures, if given multiple courses or long duration.
- Increased risk of infections such as thrush and shingles.
- Eye problems: visual disturbances or blurred vision.
- Hormone problems: Dexamethasone may affect diabetes and you may notice you start needing higher doses of the medicine if you take diabetes medication as well.
- Nervous system problems: being unable to sleep, feeling depressed, extreme mood swings, existing schizophrenia may become worse, headache or problems with your vision (including eye pain or swelling).
- Pancreatitis: this may cause severe pain in your back or stomach.
- General problems: the drug may make you feel generally unwell or tired.

While you are taking this kind of medicine, you should not come in to contact with anyone who has chickenpox, shingles, or measles if you have not had these illnesses; you may need specialist treatment if you get these diseases. If you think you may have come into contact with anyone who has these diseases, you should talk to your doctor straightaway.

What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

Talk to your doctor before taking this medicine if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or are breastfeeding.

Can I still drive and use machines?

Dexamethasone is not likely to affect your ability to drive or use any tools or machinery.

How do I store the medication?

- Keep it out of the reach and sight of children.
- Do not store it above 25°C.
- Do not store it in the fridge.
- Do not use it after the expiry date, which is printed on the pack.

Medicines should not be disposed of via wastewater or household waste.

Ask your local pharmacist how to dispose of medicines that are no longer needed. These measures will help to protect the environment.

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/patientinformation