



DEXAMETHASONE / DECADRON

A brain tumour can cause problems in the area surrounding the tumour and these problems can involve swelling of the tissue. Medication can reduce the swelling and the pressure in the brain, however it is important to be knowledgeable about the use and the side-effect of those drugs.

What is Dexamethasone and How Does it Work?

- Dexamethasone comes from a group of medications known as 'steroids' or 'corticosteroids'.
- Dexamethasone reduces the amount of fluid in the irregular blood vessels of the tumour. This leads to a reduction of the swollen area (oedema) of the normal tissue.
- Usually the human body produces its own supply of steroids. However, when steroids are taken as medication, the body will accommodate by slowing down its own supply. When reducing/ceasing the Dexamethasone, your specialist will reduce the dose gradually to allow your body to resume producing its natural supply of steroids. Gradual reduction in dosage is very important to avoid side-effects.

When is Dexamethasone Prescribed?

- *Prior to surgery* to reduce the swelling in the brain tissue surrounding the tumour.
- *During surgery* to reduce the possible damage by decreasing the flow of fluid.
- *After surgery* to reduce swelling associated with the surgical procedure.
- *During radiation therapy* to reduce swelling caused by radiation.

Steroids play an important role in treating patients with cerebral oedema associated with primary or metastatic brain tumours.



Be aware of the long-term adverse effects of corticosteroids.

Side-Effects of Dexamethasone

Steroids have several potential indications however they can cause significant side-effects. Most of the serious adverse effects are due to glucocorticoid activity.

- High sugar levels and its complications; blood levels for diabetes need to be monitored due to an increased blood sugar level when taking Dexamethasone.
- White blood cell count rise, immune system may be affected.
- Prevent or delay wound healing.
- Can mask out infection.
- Contributes to muscle loss and causes osteoporosis. Weakness in the lower limbs and shoulder are the symptoms.
- Large doses can cause behavioural and personality changes.
- Sore throat and mouth may occur (thrush or candida).
- Fluid retention may occur in the feet, face and/or hands.
- Changes to facial appearance may occur (moon face appearance).
- Weight gain may occur due to an increase in appetite.
- Upset stomach as Dexamethasone affects the lining of the abdomen.
- When on a steroid reduction regime (tapering), some symptoms of acute glucocorticoid deficiency can occur (faintness, weakness, vomiting).

How to Take Dexamethasone

- Never discontinue steroid medication abruptly.
- Follow the medication plan prescribed by your doctor.
- Take your steroids with milk or food to reduce the incidents of discomfort.
- Other medication may be prescribed to assist your comfort level (Zantac, Pepcidine).

Tips

- Report all changes in regular functions to your treating medical officer.
- Monitor your body temperature and report changes to your doctor.
- Seek medical advice for any but the most minor infections (fever or thrush); or gastrointestinal bleeding (blood in stool, abdominal pain).
- Changes to moods and behaviour should be discussed with your doctor.
- Inform your doctor and pharmacist about other medications you take.