

MELBOURNE NEUROSURGERY

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DEXMETHSONE

WHAT IS THE DRUGS GENERIC(PHARMACISTS) NAME ?

Dexamethasone

WHAT IS THE DRUG USED FOR ?

Neurosurgeons use it in the management of brain tumours where it helps reduce the swelling in the surrounding brain. It is sometimes used to reduce swelling around the nerve in sciatica or brachialgia. It may be used as a replacement hormone in patients with pituitary disease.

HOW DOES THE DRUG WORK ?

This is a steroid drug that works in brain tumour patients reducing the leakage of fluid from blood vessels affected by the tumour. This allows the brain to remove the excess water that has leaked out. In patients with sciatica it suppresses inflammation in the nerve. This steroid is a synthetic version of a normal substance secreted and required by the body for life. In pituitary disease it is used to replace a hormone that is lost.





HOW LONG BEFORE IT WORKS ?

This depends on lots of factors
In brain tumours symptoms may improve 24 hours after starting.
In sciatica it may be just as quick.

CAN I CHANGE MY DOSE ?

This may be possible but you should not change your dose unless instructed by your doctor. Stopping this suddenly and completely has been known to cause death. If it is ceased it is important to gradually reduce the dose under medical supervision.

WHAT ARE THE TABLET STRENGTHS AND WHAT SHOULD MY TABLETS LOOK LIKE ?

0.5 mg/500mcg white and with DS0.5 on top  
4 mg white and with DS4 on top  

HOW MUCH/HOW LONG AND WHEN DO I TAKE IT?

This is decided by your doctor;
Brain tumour with swelling. You are usually started on 4mg four times a day after the initial diagnosis and this is usually reduced slowly after any surgery but may be continued through other treatment and then stopped. If the swelling recurs we will restart the drug.
Sciatica. Usually 1.5 to 3 mg per day for a few weeks till the severity of your symptoms subside. It is then slowly stopped.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL THE DOCTOR BEFORE I TAKE THIS NEW MEDICATION ?

If you have had a reaction to this drug or any drugs in the past.
If you are pregnant(or breast feeding) or planning a pregnancy.
If you have a gastric ulcer or intestinal bleeding.
If you have or are being treated for any infection
Any medical conditions especially

kidney disease	Blood pressure
heart Failure	ankle swelling
liver disease	

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SIDE EFFECTS

Short term treatment

Hiccoughs	Increased appetite
Increased risk of infection	High blood pressure
Bring out diabetes	euphoria/confusion

Long term treatment

Diabetes	Cataract/glaucoma
Gastric ulceration	Rectal bleeding
Weakness from muscle wasting	
Fractured bones from osteoporosis(vertebra and hips commonly)	
Infection from immunosuppression	
Fluid retention to produce High blood pressure	
Increased weight	

WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A SIDE EFFECT

As a general rule contact your doctor but do not stop the medication. Some side effects are life threatening and if any of the below occur it is important to present to a hospital emergency immediately

Vomiting Blood or passing blood when you go the toilet
Black faecal material
Swelling of face /lips/hands/throat.
Chest pain

IF YOU HAVE BEEN ON DEXAMETHASONE FOR SOME TIME AND ARE DEVELOPING AN INFECTION IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY AS YOUR DOSE MAY NEED TO BE INCREASED

ALL DRUGS HAVE RISKS AND BENEFITS IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT TAKING ANY MEDICATION DISCUSS THIS WITH YOUR DOCTOR.

THIS LEAFLET IS AIMED AT PROVIDING SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE DRUG PRESCRIBED BY YOUR DOCTOR. THIS MAY NOT PROVIDE THE LATEST INFORMATION AS DRUG INFORMATION IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING. IT AIMS TO PROVIDE ANSWERS TO THE MORE COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS.



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IT IS IMPORTANT TO CHECK WITH YOUR PHARMACIST ABOUT THE DRUGS YOU ARE TAKING AND ANY AFFECTS THAT IT MAY HAVE ON OTHER DRUGS THAT YOU ARE TAKING AND ALSO THE EFFECTS OTHER DRUGS WILL HAVE ON YOUR NEW DRUGS.