

# Dexamethasone Information Sheet

*For patients receiving radiation therapy*

## In this document you will learn about:

- What is dexamethasone
- How to take dexamethasone
- Possible side effects and what to do if it happens

## What is dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone (also called Decadron™) is a steroid and can lessen swelling and inflammation (such as redness or pain) of the tissues. It is used to treat many types of medical problems including some types of cancer, and unwanted symptoms from the cancer or the cancer treatment.



Dexamethasone tablet

## How do I take dexamethasone?

During your radiation treatment you will usually be taking dexamethasone daily as prescribed by your doctor. Do not stop taking dexamethasone unless your doctor tells you to stop.

Always take this medication with food to help prevent stomach upset and stomach ulcers. Your radiation oncologist may also prescribe you an antacid to help lower stomach side effects while taking dexamethasone.

Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages while taking dexamethasone.

Avoid taking aspirin, ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®, Motrin®), or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories as these may worsen stomach side effects.

If you have diabetes, monitor your blood sugar levels and adjust your diabetic medication as needed with your family doctor as dexamethasone can cause increases in blood sugar levels.



## What are the side effects of the medication?

Common side effects include: small increased risk of infection (including fever, chills, cough, sore throat, burning on urination, mouth infections, or any other signs of infection), increase

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in blood sugar level, difficulty sleeping, mood swings, increased appetite, and increased sweating. If you are taking dexamethasone for more than a few weeks, it may cause skin thinning, bruising, muscle weakness in the upper legs, weight gain, and changes in shape or location of body fat. If you experience any side effects please speak with a member of your Care Team.

## **I've been given a tapering schedule for dexamethasone after I finish radiation treatment. What does this mean?**

Some people may need to keep taking dexamethasone after they finish radiation treatment. Your dose of dexamethasone will be reduced slowly before stopping completely. This dose reduction is called **tapering or weaning**. The tapering helps your body adjust to making its own natural steroid again. The side effects will disappear slowly after stopping your dexamethasone. Please follow your doctor's instructions on taking dexamethasone. Do not stop taking dexamethasone unless your doctor says it's okay to stop.

## **Possible side effects for patients who are on the tapering schedule, and what to do if it happens:**

**If you develop any of these symptoms:**

- Nausea
- Headache
- Excessive weakness or tiredness (fatigue)
- Vomiting
- Decreased alertness
- Confusion
- Decreased appetite

**Please go back to the previous dose where these problems did not exist and inform your Care Team by calling the Symptom Support Telephone Service:**

### **Symptom Support Telephone Service**



**During the day:  
Cancer Centre Symptom Support 705-728-9090 x43333**



**Evenings and weekends:  
CAREchart 1-877-681-3057**

Please visit [www.rvh.on.ca](http://www.rvh.on.ca) for the latest information and hours of operation.

The goal is to get you to the lowest dose of dexamethasone needed by your medical condition.