



# NEBRASKA CANCER SPECIALISTS

*the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West*

## Dexamethasone

**Brand name:** Decadron<sup>®</sup>

**Drug type:** Dexamethasone has many uses in the treatment of cancer. It is classified as a glucocorticosteroid.

### How this drug is given:

- This medication may be given to you in many forms. In a pill form, it is available in a variety of tablet sizes. If you are on a daily dose of dexamethasone, and you miss a dose, take the dose as soon as you remember.
- Take pills with food or after meals
- This medication may also be given by infusion into a vein (intravenously or IV)
- Dexamethasone eye drops are given to treat or prevent many eye conditions. The eye drops are most commonly given to patients with leukemia or lymphoma, to prevent inflammation of the eyes (conjunctivitis), if you are receiving high dose chemotherapy.

### Side effects:

Important things to remember about the side effects of dexamethasone:

- Most people do not experience all of the side effects listed.
- Side effects are almost always reversible and will usually go away after treatment is complete.
- There are many options to help minimize or prevent side effects.

### The following side effects are common for patients receiving dexamethasone:

- Increased appetite
- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Swelling in your ankles and feet
- Heartburn
- Muscle weakness
- Impaired wound healing
- Increased blood sugar levels. (Persons with Diabetes may need to have blood sugar levels monitored more closely and possible adjustments to diabetes medications).

### These are less common side effects for patients receiving dexamethasone:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Mood swings
- Cataracts and bone thinning (with long-term use)

## **When to contact your doctor or health care provider:**

Contact your health care provider ***immediately***, day or night, if you should experience any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 101° F, chills (possible signs of infection)
- If you feel an irregular or fast heart beat, shortness of breath, or chest or jaw pain, seek emergency help and notify your healthcare provider
- If you become suddenly confused

The following symptoms require medical attention, but are not emergency situations. Contact your health care provider ***within 24 hours*** of noticing any of the following:

- Extreme fatigue (unable to carry on self-care activities)
- Any unusual bleeding or bruising
- Black or tarry stool or blood in your stools or urine
- Nausea (interferes with ability to eat and unrelieved with prescribed medications)
- Vomiting (vomiting more than 4-5 times in a 24-hour period)
- Dizziness or lightheadedness, feeling faint.
- Persistent headache
- Severe hot flashes or mood swings
- Inability to sleep (insomnia)
- Severe skeletal (bone) pain
- Difficult or painful urination; increased urination, or severe thirst
- Changes in vision, blurred vision, eye pain, enlarged pupils, discharge
- Any new rashes or changes in your skin
- Swelling of the feet or ankles or sudden weight gain (greater than 3 pounds a week)
- Swelling, redness and/or pain in one leg or arm and not the other

**Always inform your health care provider if you experience any unusual symptoms.**