



# Dapsone

## Answers to common questions

**This handout does not list all the side effects dapsone can cause. For more details, please read the drug information that comes with your medicine. Your doctor will assess your health and will tell you what side effects you are more likely to have.**

### What is dapsone?

Dapsone is an antibiotic that is a “sulfa” drug. It is used to treat many contagious and noncontagious skin conditions.

### Which skin conditions are treated with dapsone?

Dapsone is used to control many skin conditions such as *dermatitis herpetiformis* (chronic, itchy rash), *pyoderma gangrenosum* (large, painful sores), *vasculitis* (inflammation of blood vessels), *Henoch-Schönlein purpura* (a type of vasculitis that affects blood vessels of the skin and causes a rash called “pupura”), and *Sweet syndrome* (painful skin sores and fever).

### When should you not use dapsone?

If you know that you are allergic to dapsone, or have had serious reactions to sulfa medicines, you should not take dapsone. Tell your doctor if you have major heart or lung disease. If you do, you may need a lower dose of dapsone.

### What are possible side effects of dapsone?

Some patients have these minor side effects:

- Mild headaches
- Nausea
- Changes in the red blood pigment (*hemoglobin*) that can cause lips and fingertips to look a little blue (this side effect does not cause other symptoms)

Other side effects are more serious and require medical monitoring:

- Anemia
- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness

These problems are more likely if you have a genetic condition called *glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency*. This condition causes red blood cells to break down before they normally would. People of Mediterranean, African, and Asian ancestry are at highest risk of G6PD deficiency. We may do a test to check the level of G6PD in your blood before starting you on dapsone.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

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Rarely, a large drop in the *blood count* occurs. A blood count is a group of tests that measures different parts of your blood, such as red and white blood cells. A drop in your blood count can cause fever, mouth ulcers, sore throat, or bruising.

Allergy to dapsone can cause fever, a rash, and swelling of glands in your neck. Dapsone should be stopped if an allergy is suspected.

### **Are there any other side effects if dapsone is taken for a long time?**

Rarely, taking dapsone for a long time can affect the nerves in your limbs. This can cause muscles in your hands and feet to weaken.

### **What dose should I take?**

Your doctor will advise you about your dapsone dose. Dapsone comes in 50 mg and 100 mg pills. A normal dose is 50 mg to 200 mg daily.

### **How will I be monitored for the side effects of dapsone?**

You will need to have blood tests before starting dapsone to make sure that your blood and liver are working normally. For the first 8 weeks after starting dapsone, you will have these tests every 1 to 2 weeks. After that, you will be tested every 3 months while you are taking dapsone. **If you develop any of the serious symptoms or side effects described above, you will need to have a blood count right away.**

### **Does dapsone affect fertility or pregnancy?**

Dapsone can reduce the number of sperm and their mobility. It does not affect a growing baby, but it should be avoided in pregnancy if possible. This is because it very rarely can cause low blood counts in the mother and developing baby. It has been used safely in pregnancy, though. The greatest risk to a baby in the womb is in the last 3 months. This risk can be reduced if the mother takes folic acid, a vitamin. Dapsone enters breast milk and can be harmful to babies with G6PD deficiency.

### **May I drink alcohol while taking dapsone?**

Yes.

### **Can I take other medicines at the same time as dapsone?**

**It is important to tell your doctor and pharmacist that you are taking dapsone**, since it can affect the way some other medicines work. Two types of medicines it interacts with are:

- Probenecid, which increases dapsone levels in your blood. Probenecid is usually used to treat *gout*. Gout is a type of arthritis that can develop when levels of uric acid in the blood are higher than normal.
- The antibiotics trimethoprim (Bactrim or Septra) and rifamycins (Rifampicin, Rifabutin, or Rifapentine). These medicines lower the dapsone in your blood.

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