

Tapering Your Dose of Dexamethasone

For patients at Alvord Brain Tumor Center

What is dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone is a very strong *steroid* medicine. It is used to treat *cerebral edema* (fluid on the brain) and to control short-term symptoms during chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Steroids can improve your energy and appetite. They can help reduce nausea, vomiting, and pain.

What are the side effects?

Common side effects include:

- Weight gain
- Higher blood sugar levels
- Stomach irritation or bleeding
- Insomnia (trouble sleeping)
- Muscle weakness
- Infection



Talk with your provider if side effects are causing concern.

Why do I need to taper dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone is very strong. It should never be abruptly stopped.

Our bodies naturally make a steroid called *cortisol*. When we take dexamethasone long-term, it suppresses how much cortisol our bodies make. We want you to taper your dose of dexamethasone slowly, so that your body has time to adjust to the changes.

How do I taper my dose?

To taper your dose, remember to **take as little as possible, but as much as you need**.

- If you are taking dexamethasone 2 times a day, take the 2nd dose no later than 3 p.m. Otherwise, it may disrupt your sleep.

- Taper **only** if you do not have any new or worsening symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, headache, or body aches. If you have any of these symptoms, return to the previous dose for 7 days before tapering again. Tell your nurse if you have trouble tapering.
- Your doctor may order a *morning fasting cortisol level* before you stop all dexamethasone. Depending on the cortisol level, you may need to start a different drug called hydrocortisone.
- Your doctor may advise you to take these medicines while you are taking dexamethasone:
 - A medicine to protect your stomach, such as pantoprazole, omeprazole, or famotidine
 - An antibiotic such as sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim (Bactrim DS), dapsone, or atovaquone, if you have been on more than 3 mg a day of dexamethasone for 1 month or longer

How to Taper

Fast Taper	Slow Taper
4 mg twice a day	4 mg twice a day
- After 4 to 7 days, can decrease dose	- After 7 days, can decrease dose
4 mg once a day	4 mg once a day
- After 4 to 7 days, can decrease dose	- After 7 days, can decrease dose
2 mg once a day	2 mg once a day
- After 4 to 7 days, can decrease dose	- After 14 days, can decrease dose
1 mg once a day	1 mg once a day
- After 4 to 7 days, can STOP	- After 14 days, can decrease dose to 0.5 mg once a day
	- After 14 days, check with your doctor to see if you can stop

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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