

Giving dexamethasone

Why is my child being prescribed dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone is an effective medicine for helping to reduce swelling (oedema) associated with a tumour. Dexamethasone is a steroid.

What does dexamethasone do?

Dexamethasone may reduce pain and improve other symptoms by reducing inflammation or by reducing the increased pressure associated with tumour swelling.

How will my child take dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone is prescribed as an oral (to be taken by mouth) liquid (2mg in 5mls) and oral tablet (2mg or 500micrograms). Dexamethasone is usually prescribed at a high dose for up to five days. The aim is to maximise the benefit of dexamethasone without getting side effects. Children or young people with a reduction of symptoms will usually stop taking dexamethasone after five days. However, if their symptoms reappear soon after stopping, the healthcare team will discuss further use of dexamethasone with you.

What side effects might my child experience when taking dexamethasone?

The most common side effects of high dose dexamethasone are:

- facial flushing
- sleep difficulties
- mood swings
- mild tremors
- increased appetite.

High blood pressure and glucose in the urine are rare but they are possible related side effects.

Your child may experience gastrointestinal irritation while taking dexamethasone so we usually prescribe medicine to protect the stomach, for example, lansoprazole or omeprazole.

What will happen when my child finishes taking the dexamethasone?

Some children do not benefit from taking dexamethasone. If your child does not benefit from dexamethasone then it will not be prescribed again for a particular symptom. It is important that



other medicines for symptom relief, for example pain relief medicines and anti-sickness medicines, are still taken at the same time as the dexamethasone.

Some children can become what is known as steroid-dependent and if their dexamethasone dose is reduced, their symptoms become worse. If your child is steroid-dependent and remains on dexamethasone to maintain their wellbeing, further side effects may include:

- weight gain, particularly around the face
- muscle wasting
- hiccups
- thrush
- increased hairiness
- increased vulnerability to severe infections
- impaired healing
- stretch marks
- acne.

These are usually reversible when dexamethasone is stopped but the dexamethasone should always be reduced slowly if your child has been on it for more than 7 days to allow the body's natural steroids to recover. This is done under the supervision of your specialist team.

Contact details

If you have any questions about this information, please contact:

The Children and Young People's Oncology Outreach and symptom care Nurse Specialist (CYPOONS) team

Tel: 020 8661 3625

Hours: Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Evenings, nights, weekends and all bank holidays

Please call The Royal Marsden switchboard, speak to the operator and ask for the **PATCH** service.

The Royal Marsden switchboard: 020 8642 6011

