

Giving dexamethasone

Why is my child being prescribed dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone is a steroid medicine. Dexamethasone reduces swelling (oedema) around a tumour

What does dexamethasone do?

Dexamethasone can help reduce headaches and improve other pain and symptoms e.g. weakness, slurred speech and drooling when tumour swelling is reduced.

How will my child take dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone is given as an oral liquid or a tablet. Dexamethasone is prescribed to begin with at a high dose for up to five days. The aim is to help the symptoms without getting side effects. When symptoms improve dexamethasone is stopped. If symptoms come back soon after stopping, the symptom team will talk to you about further dexamethasone use.

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 sugar in the urine are rare, but they can be a side effect of taking Dexamethasone for a long time.

Dexamethasone can cause stomach irritation, so another medicine will be prescribed to protect the stomach lining.

What will happen when my child finishes taking the dexamethasone?

Sometimes dexamethasone does not help symptoms. If dexamethasone does not help your child's symptoms, then it will not be prescribed again. Other medicines for symptom relief e.g. pain 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 can worsen. 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 symptoms are reversible when dexamethasone is stopped. The dexamethasone should always be lowered slowly if your child has been on it for more than 7 days. This allows the body's natural steroids to recover. This is done under the guidance 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

