ST CATHERINE'S HOSPICE

Supplementary medicines information for palliative care patients

All medicines are supplied with a manufacturer's 'Patient Information Leaflet'. This can provide a great deal of information about the medicine, its normal uses and side effects. However, most medicines have more than one effect on the body and for many years, palliative care (hospice) doctors have found that certain medicines are safe and effective for the treatment of symptoms ***other*** than those specified by the medicine's manufacturer and there is now plenty of experience to confirm such use.

We are providing you with this extra information to inform you of the reason(s) why you are taking this medicine and to highlight any other information. This should be read in conjunction with the ***attached*** manufacturer's patient information leaflet.

Dexamethasone

Dexamethasone is a steroid normally prescribed to treat inflammatory and allergic disorders. In palliative care, dexamethasone is also prescribed to relieve certain types of pain, to improve appetite and/or reduce sickness and/or vomiting.

Frequently asked questions

Q. What form(s) of this medicine are there and how is it usually taken?

- Dexamethasone is available as a tablet, liquid and injection. Most commonly you will be given the tablet form, which may be dispersed in a little water before taking if you prefer.
- The dose prescribed is normally up to 16mg daily but will vary depending on the symptoms you have.

Always follow the dose indicated on the label or advised by a healthcare professional.

Q. What are the most common side effects?

Dexamethasone has a number of side effects, however when it is given in low doses, side effects are less likely to occur. A few of them are listed below:

- Raised blood sugar – you may feel drowsy, extra thirsty, unwell or notice you are passing more urine than normal. If you are already a diabetic, your blood sugar may be more difficult to control.
- Fluid retention – occasionally you may experience some swelling due to fluid accumulation in your lower legs particularly around your ankles.
- Stomach irritation – dexamethasone may cause indigestion, belching or stomach pain. To reduce this you may also be given another medicine which helps protect the stomach.
- Increased appetite and alertness.

Q. What are the main special instructions and precautions when taking this medicine?

- Take this medicine with food.
- Take the daily dose of dexamethasone in the morning or half the daily dose in the morning and half at lunchtime. Taking the dexamethasone later in the afternoon may cause insomnia (sleeplessness) and sometimes agitation or anxiety.
- Never stop taking dexamethasone suddenly. This is because abrupt stopping of dexamethasone may make you feel unwell. You will be given advice on how to reduce or stop the dose of medicine gradually either by your doctor or your specialist nurse.
- Ask your pharmacist to complete a steroid alert card for you and keep it on your person. This is to make healthcare professionals aware that you are taking dexamethasone and your current dose.

Further information

If you have any questions about any of the medicines you have been prescribed or have any problems with side effects, please ring St Catherine's Hospice at 01293 447333.

This supplementary patient information leaflet was drawn up and approved by the St. Catherine's Hospice Medicines Management Group. V8 NOV 2026. Review date NOV 2028.

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