

## Prescribing Dexamethasone oral and subcut doses

In the UK, dexamethasone is available in injectable formulations as dexamethasone sodium phosphate salt and oral (PO) tablets are formulated as dexamethasone base.

Formulation and labelling changes for injectable dexamethasone came about in 2014.

Now all dosing advice and labelling must be expressed as dexamethasone base<sup>1,2</sup> This means that a 1:1 conversion oral to subcut is no longer appropriate and will lead to an unnecessarily complex and wasteful use of the ampoules and vials.

### What dose to use:

There are two injectable formulations of dexamethasone containing either 3.3mg/mL or 3.8mg/mL dexamethasone base. The hospice uses the 3.3mg/ml formulation

The Palliative Care Formulary (PCF) recommends that for pragmatic purposes, when converting between PO and SC/IV routes, both 3.3mg and 3.8mg dexamethasone base of the injectable formulations can be considered approximately equivalent to dexamethasone base 4mg PO.

In palliative care, dexamethasone is generally the systemic corticosteroid of choice for anorexia, anti-emesis, obstruction of a hollow viscus, raised intracranial pressure and spinal cord compression. The initial dose varies according to indication. (see table below).

### Typical PO and SC starting doses for dexamethasone expressed as dexamethasone base<sup>3</sup>

Indication	PO dose	subcut 3.3ml/ml formulation
Anorexia	2-6mg	1.7 - 5mg (0.5ml -1ml)
Anti-emetic	8-16mg	6.6 - 13.2mg (2-4ml)
Obstruction of hollow viscus	8-16mg	6.6 - 13.2mg (2-4ml)
Raised intracranial pressure	8-16mg	6.6 - 13.2mg (2-4ml)
Spinal cord compression	16mg	13.2mg (4ml)

### References

1) MHRA (2014) Dexamethasone 4mg/ml injection (Organon laboratories Ltd) reformulation with changes in name, concentration storage conditions and presentation. *Drug Safety Update 3*: [www.mhra.gov.uk/Safetyinformation](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/Safetyinformation)

2) UK Medicines Information (2014) Dexamethasone Injection. *In use product safety report*. [www.ukmi.nhs.uk](http://www.ukmi.nhs.uk)

3) Palliativedrugs.com Use of dexamethasone formulations in palliative care: a palliativedrugs.com response to recent changes accessed on line at [https://www.palliativedrugs.com/download/dexamethasone\\_injection\\_changes\\_V11\\_141218\\_aw\\_fi nal.pdf](https://www.palliativedrugs.com/download/dexamethasone_injection_changes_V11_141218_aw_fi nal.pdf)