

Dextromethorphan

Dextromethorphan is a unique antidepressant that works rapidly and can work when other medications have not. It is approved for depression as a combination pill with bupropion (Auvelity) but it also works on its own.

Dextromethorphan is also FDA approved to treat pseudobulbar affect (as Neudexta), a condition where people have uncontrollable emotions like laughing, crying, or irritability after a brain injury or medical illness that affects the brain. Likewise, dextromethorphan also improves agitation in dementia.

Dextromethorphan was originally developed in the late 1950's as a cough medicine, and is still used to suppress cough as Robitussin.

How it works

Dextromethorphan works through the glutamate system in the brain in a way similar to the powerful antidepressant ketamine. It also affects serotonin transmission and raises growth factors (BDNF) that protect brain cells.

How should I take it?

Dextromethorphan can be taken twice a day or all at night. Some medications extend its duration of action, allowing it to be taken all at night.

What if I forget a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it. However, if it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule.

How long do I need to take it?

How long you take dextromethorphan will depend on the reason you started it.

What happens if I stop it?

Dextromethorphan should be tapered off slowly. Abrupt discontinuation can cause diarrhea, vomiting, and muscle stiffness.

Side effects

Outside of fatigue, dextromethorphan is generally well tolerated. The most common side effects are fatigue, dizziness, headache, diarrhea, and, dry mouth.

Pregnancy: Dextromethorphan has not been adequately evaluated during pregnancy.

Risks

Rarely, people have experienced hallucinations and illusions on dextromethorphan.

Dextromethorphan has an addictive potential. Rarely, people have used it to get high. However, there have not been cases of addiction when used to treat depression.

Interactions

Dextromethorphan should not be taken with MAOI antidepressants. The web sites below help you check for drug interactions. Talk with us about the information you find as many drug interactions have only a mild effect:

reference.medscape.com/drug-interactionchecker

How to store and dispose of medication

- Keep out of the reach of children.
- Store away from heat, direct light and damp places.
- To safely dispose of unwanted pills: Do not pour in the toilet or sink (it will enter the water supply). To prevent children or pets from eating it, mix unwanted pills in a bag with a little water and inedible trash (such as coffee grounds or kitty litter) and throw in the trash.

Cost and insurance coverage

Dextromethorphan is only available generic. If you are paying out-of-pocket, the lowest cost is usually found at GoodRx.com. If you are taking it as a branded form (Auvelity or Neudexta), you can find a savings coupon at www.auvelity.com/save or www.nuedexta.com .

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 7/16/2025