Dextromethorphan

Delsym / other brands • check the exact product

A short-term cough suppressant. The right bottle—and the right dose—make a difference.

From Jeffrey Panko, PMHNP-BC's education collection ·

Draft for review · Clinical content has not been revalidated for this website.

CHECK EVERY ACTIVE INGREDIENT

COUGH MEDICINE IS NOT A PSYCHIATRIC SUBSTITUTE

The receptor drawing does not mean plain cough medicine is an approved antidepressant.

What it is used for

Temporarily quiets cough from minor throat or airway irritation, such as a cold. It does not treat the cause or make an infection clear faster.

This sheet covers plain cough medicine. Auvelity and Nuedexta contain other medicines and have separate instructions.

How it works

It acts on the brain's cough-control pathways. It can also affect other brain signaling, especially at high exposure.

Taking more can cause confusion, hallucinations or serious poisoning—not stronger or safer treatment.

What to expect over time

BEFORE EACH DOSE

Check the strength, release type and time of your last dose. Look for the same ingredient in other products.

SHORT-TERM RELIEF

Use only as needed and as directed. Do not keep increasing it if the cough is not improving.

WHEN TO REASSESS

Stop and seek advice after seven days, if cough returns, or with fever, rash or persistent headache.

Taking your medication

For the checked 15 mg immediate-release capsules or fast-release caplets, ages12+ take two every 6–8 hours as needed; no more than eight in 24 hours.

That schedule is not for a 12-hour product or every Delsym bottle. Follow your exact package; ask if you are unsure.

Do not add extra cough/cold products without an ingredient check. Do not double a missed dose.

When to get help

Call 911: trouble breathing, collapse, a seizure, severe confusion, inability to wake or swelling of the face/tongue.

Seek urgent care: fever with agitation, shaking, stiff muscles or jerking, especially after adding another medicine.

Too much taken? Call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 right away. Bring the package; do not wait for symptoms.

Early side effects

Dizziness, sleepiness, nausea or stomach upset can occur. Some people feel restless. Do not drive if your alertness or coordination is affected.

Other effects to discuss

Tell your clinician if you are taking it to change how you feel, need increasing amounts or find it hard to stop. You deserve help without judgment.

What to keep track of

Watch the cough itself as well as side effects. Breathing trouble or a worsening illness needs assessment, not another dose of cough suppressant.

Before you start

Ask first if you have asthma, chronic lung disease, a long-lasting cough, lots of mucus, significant kidney/liver disease, allergies, or take psychiatric medicines. Discuss pregnancy or breastfeeding. Do not use adult products for children; age limits differ by product. This sheet's capsule/caplet dose is not for anyone under12.

Medicines & interactions

MAOI medicines

Do not take dextromethorphan with an MAOI or during the two weeks after stopping one. Ask if you do not know whether your medicine is an MAOI.

Antidepressants and other prescriptions

Ask a pharmacist before use with antidepressants, tramadol or medicines such as bupropion, fluoxetine, paroxetine or quinidine. Serious interactions are possible.

Alcohol and duplicate products

Avoid alcohol. Check sleep aids and other sedating medicines. Several cough/cold packages may contain dextromethorphan even when their brand names look different.

Everyday tips

Use one product that matches the symptoms you actually have.

Keep a simple record of doses if more than one person is helping with medicines.

For any liquid product, use its measuring device—not a kitchen spoon—and its own instructions.

Bring all packages to the pharmacist if you are uncertain what can be combined.

Your questions, answered

Is Delsym always the same?

No. Fast-release solids and 12-hour products have different schedules. Read the full product name and Drug Facts.

Can I use it instead of Auvelity?

No. Plain cough medicine is not an interchangeable depression treatment. Do not build your own combination.

Is it safe during pregnancy or breastfeeding?

Ask which product you need. Ordinary cough doses have reassuring but limited data; unnecessary extra ingredients and alcohol are best avoided.

Do I need to taper?

A brief labeled cough course usually does not need a taper. Prolonged or high-dose use needs a separate clinical plan.

Storage & safety

Keep it in its labeled container, away from children, pets, heat and moisture. Do not share it or keep taking it for effects other than the agreed purpose. Use a pharmacy take-back option when available.

About this information

For general information only; not a substitute for individualized medical advice. This sheet does not cover every risk or interaction. Ask your prescriber or pharmacist before changing how you take this medication.

Sources

1. https://delsym.com/products/maximum-strength-delsym-cough-suppressant-caplets/
2. https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a682492.html

Educational inclusion does not mean this medication or its indications are treated at this practice. Review the guide for your exact product with your prescriber or pharmacist.

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