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Dexamethasone

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Definition

Dexamethasone is a medication used to diagnose and treat medical as well as psychiatric conditions. Dexamethasone is often used to block inflammation. As such, dexamethasone can be used as an anti-inflammatory agent to treat a number of medical conditions including a wide array of autoimmune disorders. Dexamethasone can also be used to assess for negative feedback regarding the ability of the pituitary gland to suppress adrenocortical activity.

Current Knowledge

As such, the dexamethasone suppression test (DST) was developed to diagnose medical conditions such as Cushing disease. However, the DST has also been used to diagnose major depression

(Carroll et al. 1968). The rationale for the diagnostic use of the DST to treat major depression was initially based on observations of increased adrenocortical activity in depression. The inability to suppress adrenocortical activity has been used as a means to diagnose depression and related psychiatric illnesses. Data on the efficacy of the DST has been mixed; however, recent data provided by Fountoulakis et al. (2008) suggests that under certain circumstances the DST may be helpful to better characterize patients with major depression.

Cross-References

► [Hypothalamus](#)

References and Readings

- Carroll, B. J., Martin, F. I., & Davies, B. (1968). Resistance to suppression by dexamethasone of plasma 11-O.H.C. S. levels in severe depressive illness. *British Medical Journal*, 3, 285–287.
- Fountoulakis, K. N., Gonda, X., Rihmer, Z., Fokas, C., & Iacovides, A. (2008). Revisiting the dexamethasone suppression test in unipolar major depression: An exploratory study. *Annals of General Psychiatry*, 7, 22–31.