

Diclofenac Gel

Why is this medication prescribed?

This medication is used to relieve joint pain from arthritis. Diclofenac is known as a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID).

How should this medicine be used?

Use this medication on the skin only. Gently rub the medication into the entire affected joint, usually 4 times daily or as directed by your doctor. Do not apply the medication on skin that has cuts, infections, or rashes.

Do not shower, bathe, or wash your treated hands for at least an hour after applying the medication. Wait at least 10 minutes before covering the treated area with gloves or clothing. Do not wrap, bandage, or apply heat (e.g., heating pad) to the treated area.

Do not apply more than 16 grams of diclofenac per day to any single joint of the lower body (e.g., knee, ankle, foot). Do not apply more than 8 grams of diclofenac per day to any single joint of the upper body (e.g., hand, wrist, elbow). No matter how many joints you are treating, do not use more than a total of 32 grams of diclofenac per day.

Do not get the medication in the eyes, nose, or mouth. If you do get the medication in those areas, flush with plenty of water.

If you are using this drug "as needed" (not on a regular schedule), remember that pain medications work best if they are used as the first signs of pain occur. If you wait until the pain has worsened, the medicine may not work as well.

What special precautions should I follow?

Before using diclofenac, tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are allergic to it; or to aspirin or other NSAIDs (e.g., ibuprofen, naproxen, celecoxib); or if you have any other allergies.

Before using this medication, tell your doctor or pharmacist your medical history, especially of: kidney disease, liver disease, stomach/intestine problems (e.g., bleeding, ulcers), heart disease (e.g., heart failure, history of heart attack), high blood pressure, stroke, swelling (edema, water retention), poorly controlled diabetes, a severe loss of body water (dehydration), blood disorders (e.g., anemia, bleeding/clotting problems), asthma, growths in the nose (nasal polyps).

Limit alcohol and stop smoking.

This medication may make the treated area more sensitive to the sun.

Older adults may be more sensitive to the side effects of this drug, especially stomach/intestinal bleeding and kidney effects.

During the first 6 months of pregnancy, this medication should be used only when clearly needed. It is not recommended for use during the last 3 months of pregnancy due to possible harm to the unborn baby and problems with normal labor/delivery.

Based on information from related drugs, this medication may pass into breast milk.

What should I do if I forget a dose?

If you are prescribed this drug on a regular schedule (not just "as needed") and you miss a dose, use it as soon as you remember. If it is near the time of the next dose, skip the missed dose and resume your usual dosing schedule. Do not double the dose to catch up.

What side effects can this medication cause?

Get emergency medical help if you have any of these signs of an allergic reaction: hives; difficulty breathing; swelling of your face, lips, tongue, or throat.

Stop using this medication and call your doctor at once if you have any of these serious but rare side effects:

- chest pain, weakness, shortness of breath, slurred speech, problems with vision or balance;
- black, bloody, or tarry stools;
- coughing up blood or vomit that looks like coffee grounds;
- swelling or rapid weight gain;
- urinating less than usual or not at all;
- nausea, stomach pain, low fever, loss of appetite, dark urine, clay-colored stools, jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes);
- fever, sore throat, and headache with a severe blistering, peeling, and red skin rash; or
- bruising, severe tingling, numbness, pain, muscle weakness.

Less serious side effects may include:

- dryness or itching of treated skin;
- peeling or scaling of treated skin; or
- fever, chills, sore throat, body aches or other flu symptoms.

What storage conditions are needed for this medicine?

Store at room temperature at 25 degrees C. Brief storage between 15-30 degrees C is permitted. Do not freeze

In case of emergency/overdose

This medication may be harmful if swallowed. If overdose or swallowing is suspected, contact your local poison control center or emergency room immediately.

What other information should I know?

Do not use cosmetics, sunscreen, lotions, insect repellent, or other medicated skin products not prescribed by your doctor. These products may interfere with diclofenac topical, or increase skin irritation.

Avoid exposure to sunlight or artificial UV rays (sunlamps or tanning beds) while you are using diclofenac topical.

While the risk of absorbing diclofenac topical into your bloodstream is low, all non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can increase your risk of life-threatening heart or circulation problems, including heart attack or stroke. This risk will increase the longer you use an NSAID. Do not use diclofenac topical just before or after having heart bypass surgery (also called coronary artery bypass graft, or CABG).

Seek emergency medical help if you have symptoms of heart or circulation problems, such as chest pain, weakness, shortness of breath, slurred speech, or problems with vision or balance.

This medicine can also increase your risk of serious effects on the stomach or intestines, including bleeding or perforation (forming of a hole). These conditions can be fatal and gastrointestinal effects can occur without warning at any time while you are using an NSAID. Older adults may have an even greater risk of these serious gastrointestinal side effects.

Call your doctor at once if you have symptoms of bleeding in your stomach or intestines. This includes black, bloody, or tarry stools, or coughing up blood or vomit that looks like coffee grounds.