

Pepto-Bismol (bismuth subsalicylate)

What is bismuth? Bismuth is a mineral which has certain beneficial effects within the intestinal tract. These include antidiarrheal, antibacterial and antacid effects. Subsalicylate is a non-aspirin salicylate which means it is related to aspirin.

What is it used for? This bismuth preparation is used primarily to treat diarrhea. It can be used as an antacid. Interestingly, it does have some antibacterial effects. In treating the stomach infection, *Helicobacter pylori*, this drug together with tetracycline and metronidazole is one of the best and cheapest forms of therapy, although there may be frequent minor side effects.

How do I take it? Follow your physician's instructions carefully. Shake the liquid well before using. Chew the tablets or allow them to dissolve slowly in your mouth. For diarrhea, the appropriate dose may be taken every 30 to 60 minutes as needed, with a maximum of 8 doses in 24 hours. Keep all medications away from children. Never share your medications with anyone else.

What do I do for a missed dose? Because this is used for symptomatic relief only, there is no need to be concerned about a missed dose and no need to ever double up on the medication.

Are there interactions with food or beverages? There are no interactions with food or beverages. Drink plenty of clear liquids to help prevent dehydration which may accompany diarrhea.

Are there interactions with other drugs? An interaction generally means that one drug may increase or decrease the effect of another drug. Also, the more medications a person takes, the more likely there will be a drug interaction. Bismuth subsalicylate is a form of salicylate. If taken with aspirin and if ringing in the ears occurs, discontinue use. Interactions with this drug may occur with blood thinners (Coumadin), and tetracycline.

Is there a problem if I have another disorder or disease? At times, a drug may have a different or enhanced effect when other diseases are present. At other times, the drug may worsen or affect another disease. If you have renal disease, diabetes, or gout, discuss the use of this drug with your physician.

What about allergies? People who have known allergies or asthma may be at an increased risk for a reaction from any new medication. Signs of an allergic reaction are skin rash, hives and itching. Of course, a person should not take bismuth if there has been a previous reaction to this drug, aspirin or any other salicylates.

What if I'm pregnant, considering pregnancy or breast-feeding? Any drug taken during pregnancy is potentially dangerous to a fetus. The FDA has a grading system for each drug which reflects what is known medically. Pepto-bismol is ranked C. This means

it is not known whether it will harm the unborn baby. It is unknown if bismuth pass into breast milk. Always consult the physician before taking any drug during or when planning pregnancy or during breast feeding.

What are the effects on sexual function? There are no known adverse effects of bismuth on sexual function.

Are there other precautions? Bismuth may cause a temporary and harmless darkening of the tongue and stool. Because bismuth may interfere with x-ray examinations of the GI tract, it should not be taken for several days before an abdominal x-ray exam. If diarrhea is accompanied by high fever or if it continues for more than 2 days, consult your physician. Children or teenagers who have or are recovering from chicken pox or flu should not use bismuth subsalicylate because of the possibility of Reye's Syndrome, a very serious liver condition.

How long is it safe to take bismuth? Bismuth preparations should not be taken long-term. If it does not control diarrhea, it should be stopped. Consult your physician if diarrhea continues for more than 2 days or is accompanied by fever or abdominal pain.

How about side effects? Adverse reactions can occur with any drug, even over-the-counter medications. Some of these are mild such as a stomach upset, which may be avoided by taking the medication with food. Minor reactions may go away on their own but if they persist, contact the physician. For major reactions, the patient should contact the physician immediately. For bismuth, the following are the observed side effects:

Minor:

temporary gray-black darkening of stool

Major:

stool impaction or blockage in infants or elderly patients

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