

# DHC Continus<sup>®</sup> tablets

*Dihydrocodeine hydrogen tartrate*

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## Consumer Medicine Information

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### What is in this leaflet

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Please read this leaflet carefully before you start using DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>.

This leaflet answers some common questions about DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>. It does not contain all the available information. It does not take the place of talking to your doctor or pharmacist.

All medicines have risks and benefits. Your doctor has weighed the risks of you using DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> against the benefits they expect it will have for you.

**If you have any concerns about using this medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist.**

Keep this leaflet with the medicine. You may need to read it again.

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### What DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets are taken for

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DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets contain Dihydrocodeine hydrogen tartrate. Dihydrocodeine, belongs to a class of medicines called

opioids, which are 'pain relievers'.

DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> is used for the management of severe pain where other forms of treatment have failed, or should not be used or are not tolerated or are otherwise inappropriate to provide adequate management of pain. DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> is used where the pain is responsive to opioids, and where the pain requires daily, continuous, long term treatment.

Your doctor may have prescribed DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> for another reason.

Ask your doctor if you have any questions about why DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> has been prescribed for you.

As with all strong painkillers, your body may become used to you taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets. Taking it may result in physical dependence. Physical dependence means that you may experience withdrawal symptoms if you stop taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets suddenly, so it is important to take it exactly as directed by your doctor.

This medicine is available only with a doctor's prescription.

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### Before you take DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>

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#### *When you must not use it*

#### **Do not use DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> if you:**

- are allergic (hypersensitive) to dihydrocodeine or any of the ingredients listed at the end of this leaflet;
- have severe breathing problems such as severe chronic obstructive lung disease, severe bronchial asthma or severe respiratory depression (breathing slows or weakens). Your doctor will have told you if you have these conditions;
- are having an asthma attack;
- have a severe heart problem after long-term lung disease (severe cor pulmonale);
- have a condition where the small bowel (part of your gut) does not work properly (paralytic ileus);
- are currently intoxicated from drinking alcohol;
- have an intolerance to some sugars;

- take a medicine for depression called a 'monoamine oxidase inhibitor' or have taken any in the last two weeks.

If you are not sure whether you should start using DHC CONTINUS®, talk to your doctor.

**These tablets contain lactose which is a form of sugar. If you have been told by your doctor that you have an intolerance to some sugars, contact your doctor before taking these tablets.**

**Do not take this medicine after the expiry date (EXP) printed on the pack.**

If you take it after the expiry date has passed, it may not work very well.

**Do not take it if the packaging is torn or shows signs of tampering.**

**Do not give this medicine to a child younger than 12 years of age.**

***Before you start to take it***

**Tell your doctor if you have allergies to any other medicines, foods, preservatives or dyes.**

**Tell your doctor if you:**

- are elderly;
- know you are suffering from a brain injury or tumour, or you have a head injury, severe headache or feel sick, as

this may indicate that the pressure in your skull is increased. This is because the tablets may make these symptoms worse or hide the extent of any head injury;

- are feeling unusually light-headed or faint;
- have breathing problems such as chronic obstructive lung disease, bronchial asthma or respiratory depression. Your doctor will have told you if you have these conditions. Symptoms may include breathlessness, coughing or breathing more slowly or weakly than expected;
- have an under-active thyroid gland (hypothyroidism);
- have severe kidney problems;
- have liver problems;
- have constipation or an obstructive bowel disorder;
- have inflammation of the pancreas (which causes severe pain in the abdomen and back);
- have problems with your gall bladder or bile duct;
- have an enlarged prostate gland, which causes difficulty in passing urine (in men).
- have a heart problem after long-term lung disease (cor pulmonale);
- have a condition where your breathing stops for short periods whilst you are asleep, known as sleep apnoea.
- an addiction or history of abuse of alcohol, opioids or other drugs

If you have not told your doctor about any of the

above, tell them before you start using DHC CONTINUS®.

### **Pregnancy and breastfeeding**

If you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant, or are planning to have a baby, ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice before taking these tablets.

Do not take DHC CONTINUS® tablets if you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant unless you have discussed this with your doctor and the benefits of treatment are considered to outweigh the potential harm to the baby. If you take DHC CONTINUS® tablets during pregnancy your baby may become dependent and experience withdrawal symptoms after the birth which may need to be treated, such as high-pitched cry, jitteriness, fits, poor feeding and diarrhoea.

### **Breast-feeding**

Do not take DHC CONTINUS® tablets while you are breastfeeding.

### **Addiction**

Taking this medicine regularly, particularly for a long time, can lead to addiction. DHC CONTINUS® may become habit forming, causing mental and physical dependence. If abused it may become less able to reduce pain.

Your doctor should have explained how long you will be using it for and when it is appropriate to stop, how to do this safely.

## Dependence

As with all other opioid containing products, your body may become used to you taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>. Taking it may result in physical dependence. Physical dependence means that you may experience withdrawal symptoms if you stop taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> suddenly, so it is important to take it exactly as directed by your doctor.

## Tolerance

Tolerance to DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> may develop, which means that the effect of the medicine may decrease. If this happens, more may be needed to maintain the same effect.

Rarely, increasing the dose of this medicine can make you more sensitive to pain. If this happens, you need to speak to your doctor about your treatment.

## Withdrawal

Continue taking your medicine for as long as your doctor tells you. If you stop having this medicine suddenly, your pain may worsen and you may experience some or all of the following withdrawal symptoms:

- nervousness, restlessness, agitation, trouble sleeping or anxiety
- body aches, weakness or stomach cramps
- loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea

- increased heart rate, breathing rate or pupil size
- watery eyes, runny nose, chills or yawning
- increased sweating.

Your doctor will discuss with you how to gradually reduce your dose before stopping the medicine. It is important that you do not stop taking the medicine suddenly as you will be more likely to experience withdrawal symptoms.

## ***Taking other medicines***

**Tell your doctor if you are taking any other medicines, including medicines that you buy without a prescription from your pharmacy, supermarket or health food shop.**

You should also tell any health professional who is prescribing a new medication for you that you are taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>.

Some medicines may interfere DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>.

Taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets at the same time as other medicines that slow down the central nervous system can cause slow or difficulty breathing (respiratory depression), severe sleepiness, loss of consciousness and death.

These medicines include:

- other medicines used to treat pain known as opioids (such as codeine or morphine);
- medicines used to treat anxiety;
- medicines used to make you feel sleepy (such as benzodiazepines);
- medicines used to treat psychiatric or mental disorders (such as phenothiazines);
- medicines used to treat depression;
- a type of medicine used to treat depression known as monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), such as tranylcypromine, phenelzine and isocarboxazid. You should not take DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets if you are currently taking this type of medicine, or have taken this medicine in the last two weeks.
- alcohol

Because of this, your doctor will only prescribe DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets where there are no other treatment options, and only in small doses for short periods of time. If you or your friends, family or caregivers notice that you are having difficulty breathing or that you have become very sleepy or lost consciousness you (or they) should inform your doctor immediately.

These medicines may be affected by DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>, or may affect how well it works. You may need different amounts of

your medicine, or you may need to take different medicines.

Your doctor or pharmacist has more information on medicines to be careful with or avoid while taking DHC CONTINUS®.

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## **How to take DHC CONTINUS®**

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### ***How much to take***

**Your doctor will tell you exactly how much to take. Follow the instructions given to you by your doctor and pharmacist exactly.**

**DHC CONTINUS® tablets must be swallowed whole and not broken, chewed or crushed.**

DHC CONTINUS® tablets are designed to work properly over 12 hours when swallowed whole. If a tablet is broken, crushed or chewed, the entire 12-hour dose may be absorbed rapidly into your body. This can be dangerous, causing serious problems such as an overdose, which may be fatal.

### ***When to take it***

The tablets should be taken at twelve-hourly intervals.

The usual starting dose is 60 mg to 120 mg every 12 hours. If you are elderly your doctor may suggest a lower starting dose.

Your doctor will prescribe the dose required to treat your pain. If you find that you are still in pain whilst taking these tablets, discuss this with your doctor.

### ***How long to take it***

**Continue taking your medicine for as long as your doctor tells you.**

If you stop taking this medicine suddenly, your pain may worsen and you may experience withdrawal symptoms such as:

- body aches
- loss of appetite, nausea, stomach cramps or diarrhoea
- fast heart rate
- sneezing or runny nose
- chills, tremors, shivering or fever
- trouble sleeping
- increased sweating and yawning
- weakness
- nervousness or restlessness.

### ***If you forget to take it***

**If you forget to take your tablets, contact your doctor or pharmacist for advice.**

**Do not take a double dose to make up for the dose you have missed.**

This will increase the chance of you getting unwanted side effects.

If you have trouble remembering when to take your medicine, ask your pharmacist for hints. For example, take your medicine at the same time each morning and evening such as 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.

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## **In case of overdose**

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### ***If you take too much (overdose)***

**Immediately telephone your doctor or the National Poisons Centre (telephone 0800 POISON or 0800 764 766), or go to accident and emergency at your nearest hospital, if you think that you or anyone else may have taken too much DHC CONTINUS®.**

Do this even if there are no signs of discomfort or poisoning.

People who have taken an overdose may feel very sleepy, sick or dizzy. They may also have breathing difficulties leading to unconsciousness or even death and may need emergency treatment in hospital.

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## **While you are taking DHC CONTINUS®**

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### ***Things you must do***

**Use DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets exactly as your doctor has prescribed.**

**Before you start on a new medicine, remind your doctor and pharmacist that you are using NORSPAN patches.**

**Tell any other doctors, dentists, and pharmacists who treat you that you are using this medicine.**

**If you are going to have surgery, tell the surgeon and anaesthetist that you are using this medicine.**

It may affect other medicines used during surgery.

**If you become pregnant while taking this medicine, tell your doctor immediately.**

If you are about to be started on any new medicine tell your doctor and pharmacist that you are taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>.

Tell your doctor if your pain is getting worse. Also tell your doctor if you are having any problems or difficulties while you are being treated with DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets.

Tolerance to DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> may develop which means that the effect of the medicine may decrease. If this happens, your doctor may review your dose so that you get adequate pain relief.

**Keep enough DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets with you to last over weekends and holidays.**

***Things you must not do***

**Do not drink alcohol while you are taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets.**

Drinking alcohol whilst taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets may make you feel more sleepy and increase the risk of serious side effects, such as shallow breathing with the risk of stopping breathing and loss of consciousness. Do not give DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> to anyone else, even if they have the same condition as you.

**Do not take OxyContin tablets to treat any other complaint unless your doctor tells you to. Do not give your medicine to anyone else, even if they have the same condition as you.**

**Do not stop taking your medicine, exceed the dose recommended or change the dosage without checking with your doctor.**

Over time your body may become used to dihydrocodeine. If you stop taking it suddenly, your pain may worsen and you may experience unwanted side effects such as withdrawal symptoms. This is called physical dependence.

If you need to stop taking this medicine, your doctor will gradually reduce the amount you take each day, if possible, before stopping the medicine completely.

***Things to be careful of***

**Do not drive or operate machinery until you know**

**how DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets affect you.**

These tablets may cause a number of side effects such as drowsiness, which could affect your ability to drive or use machinery.

These are usually most noticeable when you first start taking the tablets or when changing to a higher dose. If you are affected you should not drive or use machinery.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure whether it is safe for you to drive while taking this medicine.

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## **Side Effects**

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Tell your doctor or pharmacist as soon as possible if you do not feel well while you are using DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>.

All medicines can have side effects. Sometimes they are serious, most of the time they are not. You may need medical treatment if you get some of the adverse effects. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to answer any questions you may have.

**Do not be alarmed by this list of possible side effects.**

Not everybody experiences them.

**Tell your doctor or pharmacist as soon as**

**possible if you do not feel well while you are taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets.**

This medicine helps most people with pain, but it may have unwanted side effects in some people. Other side effects not listed here may also occur.

**Ask your doctor or pharmacist to answer any questions you may have.**

**Tell your doctor if you notice any of the following and they worry you:**

**Common side effects (May affect more than 1 in 100 people):**

- constipation
- feeling or being sick, nausea and vomiting
- drowsiness
- dry mouth, abdominal pain or discomfort.

**Uncommon side effects (May affect fewer than 1 in 100 people)**

- withdrawal symptoms;
- diarrhoea;
- a condition where the bowel does not work properly (paralytic ileus);
- mood changes, unpleasant or uncomfortable mood;
- headache, confusion, a feeling of unusual weakness, tiredness, generally feeling unwell;
- hallucinations;
- a feeling of dizziness or spinning (vertigo), seizures, fits or convulsions;

- tingling or numbness;
- low blood pressure;
- decreased sexual drive;
- difficulty or pain in passing urine;
- swelling or puffiness of the skin, flushing of the skin;
- itching, redness or rash, or a raised itchy rash (hives);
- shortness of breath;
- increased sweating;
- a worsening in liver function tests (seen in a blood test);
- dependence and addiction
- increased levels of pain.

**Side effects with unknown frequency (frequency cannot be estimated from the available data)**

- a need to take increasingly higher doses to obtain the same level of pain relief (tolerance);
- development of a condition where your breathing stops for short periods whilst you are asleep, known as sleep apnoea;
- withdrawal symptoms in babies born to mothers who have used DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup> tablets in pregnancy.

Other adverse effects not listed above may also occur in some patients. Tell your doctor if you notice any other effects.

Do not be alarmed by this list of possible adverse effects. You may not experience any of them.

**Some of these side effects may require urgent medical treatment.**

**When seeking medical attention, take this leaflet and any remaining tablets with you to show the doctor.**

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## After taking DHC CONTINUS<sup>®</sup>

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### **Storage**

**Store below 30°C. Protect from light and moisture.**

Do not store it or any other medicine in the bathroom, near a sink or on a window sill.

**Keep out of the sight and reach of children.**

A locked cupboard at least one-and-a-half metres above the ground is a good place to store medicines.

### **Disposal**

**If you no longer need to use this medicine or it is out of date, take it to any pharmacy for safe disposal.**

**Do not use this medicine after the expiry date.**

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## Product description

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### **What it looks like**

DHC CONTINUS® tablets are white, biconvex, capsule-shaped, 12mm in length and 5mm wide, plain on one side and embossed DHC 60 on the other.

This leaflet was prepared in Jan 2024.

DHC CONTINUS® tablets are supplied in bottles of 60 tablets.

### ***Ingredients***

#### Active ingredient:

Dihydrocodeine hydrogen tartrate 60mg, equivalent to 40mg dihydrocodeine

#### Inactive ingredients:

- Anhydrous lactose
- Hydroxyethylcellulose
- cetostearyl alcohol
- magnesium stearate
- purified talc

Contains Lactose

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## **Sponsor Details**

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DHC CONTINUS® is supplied in New Zealand by:

Pharmaco (N.Z.) Ltd

PO BOX 4079

Auckland 1140

Toll Free (Medical enquiries):  
0800 773 310

® DHC CONTINUS is a registered trade mark

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## **Date of Preparation**

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