



# Drug Information

## NELFINAVIR (Viracept)

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### Why am I given NELFINAVIR as my medication?

- NELFINAVIR (also called Viracept) is a drug used in combination with other medications to treat HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection.
- NELFINAVIR blocks a protein called “protease”. It belongs to a class of drugs called Protease Inhibitors (PI). The HIV virus needs this protein to reproduce itself, so by blocking it the drug helps slow down HIV disease.
- Taking this medication can reduce the amount of virus in your body. It can also reduce your chance of getting sick from AIDS related illnesses, help you stay healthy longer or get your health back. It may also reduce the damage to your immune system.

### How do I take this medication?

- NELFINAVIR comes in 250 mg tablets. The usual dose of NELFINAVIR is 750mg (3 tablets) three times daily or 1250 mg (5 tablets) twice daily. NELFINAVIR should be taken with food.
- NELFINAVIR should be kept at room temperature in a dry place. Don't put the medicine in the bathroom or kitchen, as moisture may cause the medicine to lose its effectiveness.
- Keep it out of reach of children.

### What if I forget to take a dose?

- Take the dose you missed as soon as possible. However, if it is within 2 hours of your next dose, just continue with your regular schedule. Do not double the dose.
- Recent studies have found that for the anti-HIV medications to work, all the medications need to be taken regularly and consistently. Missing or skipping doses of your medication may make it lose its effectiveness as the virus can change itself and become resistant to the medication.

### What are the side effects of NELFINAVIR?

- The most common side effect of NELFINAVIR is diarrhea. This can often be controlled with anti-diarrheal medications such as loperamide (Imodium) or anti-motility agents such as codeine. Taking a supplement of calcium (500 mg twice daily) or bulking agents (such as Metamucil and a high fibre diet) may also be helpful in controlling diarrhea.
- Other side effects may include:
  - stomach upset
  - nausea
  - gas
  - rash
- Longer-term side effects of NELFINAVIR can include:
  - increase in the sugar and fat (cholesterol, triglyceride) levels in your blood
  - abnormal body fat distribution (increase in waist and breast size and thinning of the



face, arms and legs).

- Consult your doctor or pharmacist if you have these side effects. Do not stop the medication or change your dose before you talk to them.

### **Can I take NELFINAVIR with other medications?**

- NELFINAVIR can interact with other drugs. It is important that you tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the prescription and non-prescription medications (including vitamins and herbs) you are taking.
- NELFINAVIR should not be taken with Halcion (triazolam), Versed (midazolam), Hismanal (astemizole), Seldane (terfenadine), Prepulsid (cisapride), Cordarone (amiodarone), Quinidine, Rifampin and Ergot medications (e.g. cafergot).
- NELFINAVIR can decrease the effectiveness of birth control pills. An alternative method for birth control (such as latex condoms) should be used if you are on NELFINAVIR.

### **Can I take NELFINAVIR with alcohol or street drugs?**

- It is advisable to avoid excessive amount of alcohol while you are taking NELFINAVIR. Alcohol may interact with your medications. Do not skip a dose of your medication because you want a drink.
- NELFINAVIR may also interact with other street drugs, consult your doctor and pharmacist if you are using street drugs so they can advise you with the necessary precautions.

### **Can I take NELFINAVIR if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?**

- If you are pregnant and wish to take NELFINAVIR, please consult your doctor.
- Since the HIV virus can be transmitted through breast milk, breast-feeding is not recommended in HIV positive women.

### **What other precautions do I need to know when taking NELFINAVIR?**

- You should keep your appointments with your physician for blood tests to check your liver and kidney function, blood sugar, cholesterol and triglyceride regularly.
- Make sure you have a continuous supply of the medication.
- NELFINAVIR does not kill the virus or cure AIDS. It also does not prevent the transmission of HIV, so please remember to always take precautions if you are having sex (e.g. use latex condoms) or using drugs (e.g. use clean syringes).

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