



Drug Information

ABACAVIR (Ziagen)

Last updated September 2003

Why am I given ABACAVIR as my medication?

- ABACAVIR (also called Ziagen) is a drug that is used in combination with other drugs to treat HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection.
- ABACAVIR is also found in the anti-HIV drug Trizivir.
- ABACAVIR blocks a protein called “Reverse Transcriptase”, as a result, it belongs to a class of drugs called Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (RTI). 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?

- ABACAVIR comes in 300 mg tablets and as a liquid (20mg/c.c.). The usual dose of ABACAVIR is 300 mg twice a day. ABACAVIR can be taken with or without food.
- ABACAVIR should be kept at room temperature in a dry place. Avoid putting 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 ABACAVIR?

- The most serious side effect of ABACAVIR is a hypersensitive reaction that has the symptoms of a flu-like illness. This happens in about 3% of people who take Abacavir and can be fatal. Symptoms can include fever and chills, muscle and joint pain, fatigue and feeling rundown, nausea and vomiting, skin rash or shortness of breath. If you have two or more of the above symptoms, call your doctor right away. Do not stop the medication before you talk to your health service providers.
- Other common side effects of ABACAVIR can include skin rash, fatigue, headache, insomnia, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting, and muscle pain. Consult your physician or pharmacist if you have these side effects.



Can I take ABACAVIR with other medications?

- ABACAVIR 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) that you are taking.
- Other drugs that may interact with ABACAVIR include: Antabuse, Parafon Forte, Chloral Hydrate and Isoniazid. Consult your physician or pharmacist before taking these medications.

Can I take ABACAVIR with alcohol or street drugs?

- Avoid alcohol if you are on ABACAVIR. Alcohol may increase the level of Abacavir and its side effects.
- ABACAVIR 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 ABACAVIR if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

- If you are pregnant and wish to take ABACAVIR, please consult your doctor or pharmacist about taking medication.
- 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 ABACAVIR?

- Keep your appointments with your physician for blood tests to check your liver and kidney function regularly.
- Make sure you have a continuous supply of the medication.
- ABACAVIR 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).

Copyright @ACAS 2001 & 2003. This fact sheet is produced by ACAS (Asian Community AIDS Services) and is available in English, Chinese (Traditional and Simplified), Tagalog and Vietnamese. Funding for this project is provided by the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) and Health Canada. Copies can be downloaded at : www.acas.org/treatment. ACAS provides comprehensive support and case management services for Asian people living with HIV/AIDS; and HIV/AIDS prevention education to the east and southeast Asian Canadian populations in the Greater Toronto Area. ACAS is located at 33 Isabella Street, Suite 107, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2P7. Tel: (416)-963-4300, Fax: (416)-963-4371 Email: support@acas.org

Legal Disclaimer: While we make every attempt to ensure the accuracy and reliability of information contained in this website/ fact sheet, the information provided here are designed for reference purposes only. These information should not be relied upon as a substitute for medical advice from a qualified professional health care provider and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a condition or illness. Please consult a physician if you have any concerns about your health, treatment regimen and questions related to HIV/AIDS. ACAS, its employees and board members will not be responsible for any loss or harm, however arising, from the use of, or reliance on this information.