

# COMBIVIR®

**Other NAMES:** Combination of zidovudine 300 mg + lamivudine 150 mg in each tablet

WHY is this drug prescribed?

Combivir® is a combination of two antiretroviral (anti-HIV) drugs, zidovudine and lamivudine, into one tablet. Combivir® is used together with one or more antiretrovirals to delay the progression of HIV infection. By doing this, your immune system should improve (increase in CD4<sup>+</sup> count) and you will be better protected against infections.

Zidovudine and lamivudine do not cure AIDS or completely kill the HIV virus, but help to prevent further damage by slowing down the production of new viruses. Treatment with Combivir® does not reduce the risk of passing infection on to others. You will still be able to pass HIV by sexual contact, by blood transfer or by sharing needles. You should always use appropriate precautions to prevent passing HIV on to others.

## HOW should this drug be taken?

Generally, the dose is 1 tablet twice daily. Combivir® can be taken with or without food.

Your dosage is:

\_\_\_\_\_ tablet \_\_\_\_\_ times a day

## What should you do if you FORGET a dose?

If you miss a dose of Combivir®, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is time for your next dose, do not double the dose, just carry on with your regular schedule.

## Why should you not forget to take this drug?

If you miss doses of Combivir®, the amount of HIV virus in your blood (known as the viral load) will start increasing again and your immune system will be further damaged. A few missed doses can be enough for the two components of Combivir® to stop being active. A phenomenon known as **resistance**. When this happens, other antiretrovirals that work in a similar way as zidovudine and lamivudine may also become inactive. **Therefore, missing doses of Combivir® can decrease treatment options for the future.** Even if you do not feel well, you should always take your doses of Combivir®. Please do not stop Combivir® without talking to your doctor first.

## What ADVERSE EFFECTS can this drug cause? What should you do about them?

Most adverse effects are mild and often temporary, and may include headache, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, decreased appetite, fatigue, general feeling of being unwell, numbness or tingling feeling in the fingers, toes or limbs, fever, insomnia and rash. Your doctor and pharmacist can suggest ways to manage these symptoms.

Serious effects of zidovudine and lamivudine include anemia (reduced number of red blood cells that can make you feel tired or short of breath), leucopenia (a decrease in the number of white blood cells so that you have a higher risk of bacterial infection), or thrombocytopenia (a decrease in the number of platelets that can increase your risk of bleeding or bruising). These adverse effects usually occur after you have been on the drug for a long period of time. Blood tests will be done regularly to check for any changes in these values. Also, muscle pain can occur after you have been on the drug for many months. Inform your doctor if you notice any symptoms of fever, chills, shortness of breath, racing heart beat, fatigue, bleeding, bruising or muscle pain.

Rarely, very severe stomach cramps accompanied with vomiting may occur and be caused by an inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis). Consult a doctor immediately if this occurs.

Your blood will routinely be checked for any changes in liver and pancreas function.

As with most drugs, some people experience allergic reactions. If you have any of the following symptoms soon after taking Combivir®, STOP taking the drug and tell your doctor immediately: sudden shortness of breath, chest pain, swelling of eyelids, face or lips, and skin rash anywhere on the body.

It is important that you keep your doctor appointments and come for your laboratory tests so that your progress can be followed.

**What other PRECAUTIONS should you follow while using this drug?**

You must make sure that you are taking the right dose. If you take higher doses of Combivir® than what is prescribed, you may increase the chance of having adverse effects. If you take lower doses of Combivir® than what is prescribed, the HIV virus may become resistant to zidovudine and lamivudine.

Certain drugs can increase or decrease the effect of Combivir®. Also, Combivir® might influence the effect of other drugs you are taking. Inform your doctor and pharmacist of all prescribed and non-prescribed drugs you are taking. As well, you should inform them of natural products you are taking. If you wish to start a new drug or natural product, please consult with your pharmacist before doing so.

Please inform your doctor if you are pregnant. Your doctor can recommend the appropriate treatment to help to reduce the risk of passing the HIV virus on to your baby. Breastfeeding is not recommended if you have HIV as you might transmit the virus to your baby through your breast milk.

**How should this drug be STORED?**

Combivir® should be stored in a cool (15-30°C) dry place, protected from light and well out of the reach of children. Ensure that the drug is not expired by checking the expiry date ("EXP") shown on the outside of the package.

Do not store in your bathroom or kitchen, as heat and moisture may cause the medication to be less active.

**If you have any questions or concerns about this drug or if you are experiencing adverse effects, please discuss them with your pharmacist, doctor or nurse.**

**Write questions or concerns down to ensure they are addressed.**

The following pharmacist is available to answer questions:

**Pharmacist:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

Reference: Product monograph. Combivir® (lamivudine - zidovudine). Mississauga, ON, Canada: GlaxoSmithKline, 2008. Prepared by the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional Specialty Group, 2003. Reviewed 2009.

Additional medication fact sheets and updates may be found at: [www.hivclinic.ca](http://www.hivclinic.ca).

***COMBIVIR®***  
***(ZIDOVUDINE & LAMIVUDINE )***

***MEDICATION***

***FACT SHEET***