

EFAVIRENZ

Other NAMES: Sustiva®

Efavirenz is also a part of Atripla®, a combination product which includes efavirenz, tenofovir and emtricitabine.

WHY is this drug prescribed?

Efavirenz is an antiretroviral (anti-HIV) drug that is part of the non nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NNRTIs or Non Nukes) family. It is used together with other antiretrovirals to delay the progression of HIV infection. By doing this, your immune system should improve (increase in CD4⁺ count) and you will be better protected against infections.

Efavirenz does not cure AIDS or completely kill the HIV virus, but helps to prevent further damage by slowing down the production of new viruses. Treatment with efavirenz 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 600 mg once a day preferably at bedtime. Taking efavirenz at bedtime may decrease the risk of having adverse effects during the day. Although efavirenz may be taken with or without food, when it was taken with food, the frequency of side effects was increased. It should not be taken with a very high-fat meal.

Your dosage is:

- 50 mg gold/white capsule
- 200 mg gold capsule
- 600 mg yellow tablet

____ capsule/tablet (____mg) once daily

What should you do if you FORGET a dose?

If you miss a dose of efavirenz, 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 efavirenz, 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 efavirenz to stop being active. A phenomenon known as **resistance**. When this happens, other antiretrovirals that work in a similar way as efavirenz may also become inactive. **Therefore, missing doses of efavirenz can decrease treatment options for the future.** Please do not stop efavirenz without talking to your doctor first.

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

Some people taking efavirenz will have symptoms such as light-headedness, difficulties sleeping, vivid dreams, sleepiness, dizziness, restlessness, morning “hang-over” feeling, or difficulties concentrating. The majority of people who take efavirenz will not get these symptoms. Also, people who develop these symptoms might recognize only one or two symptoms. The symptoms usually appear after a few days on efavirenz and then tend to disappear after several weeks. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if these symptoms bother you. They can recommend methods to decrease these adverse effects.

When starting efavirenz, many people also develop a mild rash. Tell your doctor immediately if you develop a rash while taking efavirenz. In most cases, the rash can be treated with anti-inflammatory drugs or antihistamines. Consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking any medications to treat the rash.

If you develop a severe rash, or a rash with symptoms such as fever, blistering, mouth sores, red eyes, swelling, muscle or joint aches and a general feeling of being unwell, STOP taking efavirenz. **Speak with your doctor immediately.**

Your doctor will do blood tests regularly to see if there are any changes in your liver function, cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

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 efavirenz than what is prescribed, you may increase the chance of having adverse effects. If you take lower doses of efavirenz than what is prescribed, the HIV virus may become resistant to efavirenz.

Certain drugs can increase or decrease the effect of efavirenz. Also, efavirenz 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 or recreational (street) drugs you are taking. If you wish to start a new drug or natural product, please consult with your pharmacist before doing so.

The doses of certain drugs may need to be increased if you are taking efavirenz.

Efavirenz should NOT be taken if you are pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant. Please inform your doctor if you believe you are pregnant or if you wish to become pregnant in the near future. A registry has been established to monitor patients on efavirenz while pregnant. Please inform your doctor if you are pregnant, as he/she is able to register your exposure at 1-800-258-4263. Your doctor can recommend an appropriate treatment to help reduce the risk of passing the HIV virus on to your baby. Breastfeeding is NOT

recommended if you have HIV as you can transmit the virus to your baby through your breast milk.

How should this drug be STORED?

Efavirenz 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 has 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 drug 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 Sustiva™ (efavirenz).
Montréal, QC, Canada: Bristol-Myers Squibb, 2008.
Prepared by the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional
Specialty Group, 2009.

Additional medication fact sheets and updates may be found at: www.hivclinic.ca

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(Sustiva®)

MEDICATION

FACT SHEET