

# FOSCARNET

**Other Names:** Foscavir®

## WHY is this drug prescribed?

Foscarnet is an antiviral drug used to treat infections caused by cytomegalovirus (CMV) (ie: retinitis). This drug is also used to prevent a relapse of CMV after the initial treatment of this infection. You should have your eyes checked on a regular basis.

Occasionally, foscarnet can be used to treat severe herpes simplex viral (HSV) infections in patients who have not responded to, or who have developed severe adverse effects to the antiviral agent acyclovir.

## HOW should this drug be taken?

Foscarnet is given intravenously (I.V.) as a slow infusion over 1 to 2 hours. The dose may be given once to three times daily depending on your needs and depending on the reason it is prescribed (treatment versus prevention). The exact dose will be calculated based on your weight and may need to be adjusted if you have kidney problems. Foscarnet may be given for 2 to 4 weeks or indefinitely.

Your dosage is:

\_\_\_mL (\_\_\_mg) over \_\_\_hours \_\_\_times a day

In your area, foscarnet will be supplied to you by \_\_\_\_\_.

Usually, your doctor will prescribe an infusion of normal saline that is to be received intravenously before each dose of foscarnet. Your normal saline infusion will be given over 1 to 2 hours. Overall, it will take 2 to 4 hours to receive each dose.

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

Foscarnet will likely be given at a clinic by an experienced nurse. Ensure that you do not miss your appointment to receive your dose of foscarnet. Missing doses of foscarnet may cause your CMV infection to come back or worsen. If you have missed an appointment, call your clinic immediately to rebook an appointment to receive your dose as soon as possible.

If you are receiving foscarnet at home and you have missed a dose, administer 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.

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

The most serious problem with foscarnet is that it can have a harmful effect on the kidneys. Certain blood tests measuring kidney function (eg. creatinine) will be done regularly to check how well your kidneys are working during therapy. It is important to drink as much fluid as you can. Also, the intravenous normal saline will help protect your kidneys. Please notify your doctor if you urinate less than usual.

The most common adverse effects occurring during foscarnet therapy are **nausea, vomiting, fatigue, headache and diarrhea**. These symptoms usually last for only the first few days of therapy. If they persist and are bothersome, contact your doctor or pharmacist.

**Tremor, muscle twitching, convulsions and dizziness** sometimes occur and disappear once the drug is stopped. Contact your doctor if you notice these symptoms.

**Anemia** (a reduced number of red blood cells that can make you feel tired or short of breath), **leukopenia** (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) may occur. Blood tests will be done regularly to check for any changes in these values. Inform your doctor if you notice any symptoms of fever, chills, shortness of breath, rapid or irregular heartbeat, fatigue, bleeding or bruising.

**Penile, vaginal and mouth ulcers**, though not common, may occur. Adequate hydration and good hygiene may prevent or minimize these problems.

Foscarnet may cause other changes in your blood work, the most important being a **fall in calcium**. Your doctor will also check for increases in phosphate and for decreases in phosphate, potassium and magnesium. Call the clinic if you notice the following symptoms that are caused by low calcium levels: **tingling around the mouth, numbness in the hands or feet or a general burning, tingling, or prickling feeling**. Your blood work will be monitored and you will be notified if it is necessary to take a calcium or some other type of supplement.

**Irritation (redness) or pain** may develop at the injection site (eg. forearm) when foscarnet is given into a small vein. This problem is preventable by further diluting the drug or giving it more slowly. This problem can also be avoided by infusing the drug into a larger vein.

Rarely, an allergic reaction to foscarnet may develop. Please consult a doctor immediately if you develop a **skin rash**.

**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?**

Before beginning foscarnet, inform your doctor if you are allergic to this drug or if you have kidney or blood disorders. Also, notify your doctor if you have had convulsions or a low calcium blood level in the past.

As this drug may cause some dizziness, you should make sure you know how you react to this drug before you drive, use machinery or do anything else that could be dangerous if you are dizzy.

When given with foscarnet, many drugs may increase the risk of developing adverse effects. Inform your doctor and pharmacist if you are taking the following drugs:

- aminoglycoside antibiotics (gentamicin, tobramycin, amikacin, etc.)
- amphotericin B (Fungizone®, Abelcet®, Ambisome®)
- cidofovir (Vistide®)
- intravenous pentamidine (Pentacarinat®)

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.

If while handling the drug, it accidentally spills, avoid contact with your skin, eyes, or mucous membranes (eg. nose). Wear rubber gloves while cleaning up any spills. If the drug comes in contact with your skin or mucous membranes, wash the area thoroughly with soap and water, and rinse thoroughly with water.

The safety of foscarnet during pregnancy or breastfeeding has not been established. Please consult your doctor if this is a concern.

**How should this drug be STORED?**

If you are to receive foscarnet at home, the diluted foscarnet intravenous solution should be kept at room temperature (15 - 30°C). It is recommended that the solution be used within 24 hours of dilution. Keep well out of the reach of children.

Check your foscarnet bag or bottle to ensure that there are no leaks and that there are no solid particles in the solution. The solution should be clear and colorless. If not, you should not use the bag or bottle.

**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: Foscarnet (Foscavir®) Product Monograph. Astra Zeneca, Wilmington, DE, USA, 2006. 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)

**FOSCARNET**

**MEDICATION**

**FACT SHEET**