

SAQUINAVIR

Other NAMES: Invirase®

WHY is this drug prescribed?

Saquinavir is an antiretroviral (anti-HIV) drug that belongs to a class of drugs called **protease inhibitors**. Protease inhibitors interfere with a different step in virus reproduction than other classes of drugs previously available to fight HIV.

Saquinavir 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.

Saquinavir 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 saquinavir 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?

Saquinavir is available in two forms, a hard-gel 200 mg capsule (green and light brown) or a film-coated 500 mg tablet (light brownish-orange).

The recommended dose for saquinavir is 1000 mg (2 x 500 mg) twice daily in combination with other antiretroviral agents. Saquinavir should always be taken at the same time as zidovudine.

To ensure that saquinavir is active, it should be taken with a meal or a substantial snack or less than 2 hours after a meal or substantial snack.

Your dosage is:

500 mg film-coated tablet
____ tablets (____mg) ____ times a day

or

200 mg hard-gel capsule
____ capsules (____mg) ____ times a day

Saquinavir capsules or tablets should be swallowed unchewed, with water or some other non-alcoholic drink. You should avoid excessive consumption of alcohol during your treatment.

What should you do if you FORGET a dose?

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

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

Most adverse effects reported with saquinavir are mild and may include diarrhea, loose stools, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, headache,

weakness and fatigue. If these effects occur and bother you, please call the clinic or discuss them at your next visit.

Regular blood tests will be done to detect any changes in your liver or pancreas function. Also, your doctor will look for increases in your cholesterol, triglyceride and blood sugar level.

The long-term effects of saquinavir are unknown at this time. Further studies are being carried out. Abnormal weight gain or changes in body shape have been reported, but it is uncertain if saquinavir is responsible for these changes.

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

Certain drugs can increase or decrease the effect of saquinavir. Also, saquinavir 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.

Do NOT take the following drugs with saquinavir:

- Amiodarone (Cordarone®)
- Bepridil
- Ergot derivatives [Ergotamine (Cafergot®, Bellergal®, Ergodryl™, Gravergol®), ergo-

- novine, dihydroergotamine (Migranal®), methylergonovine (Methergine®)]
- Flecainide (Tambocor®)
- Midazolam (Versed®)
- Pimozide (Orap®)
- Propafenone (Rhythmol®)
- Quinidine
- Rifampin (e.g. Rifadin®, Rimactane®, Rofact™)
- Triazolam (Halcion®)

The safety of saquinavir has not been established during pregnancy. Please inform your doctor if you are pregnant. Your doctor can recommend the 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?

Saquinavir hard-gel capsules and film-coated tablets should be stored in a cool (15 - 30°C) dry place, protected from light. Ensure that the drug has not expired by checking the expiry date ("EXP") shown on the outside of the package.

Always store the saquinavir in its originally dispensed package. Do not store where there is heat and moisture (for example, in the bathroom or near the stove).

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: _____

SAQUINAVIR

(Invirase®)

MEDICATION

FACT SHEET

Reference: Product monograph Invirase® (saquinavir mesylate). Mississauga, On, Canada: Hoffmann – La Roche Limited, 2008. Prepared by the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional Specialty Group, 2009.

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