

THALIDOMIDE

Other NAMES: Thalomid®

WHY is this drug prescribed?

Thalidomide was once widely used during pregnancy to relieve morning sickness. While it is no longer used for this purpose, it is potentially useful in the treatment of several AIDS-related conditions, including weight loss, wasting and ulcers (anal, mouth, and/or throat) of unknown cause.

Thalidomide is also used in the management of other immune diseases such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple myeloma and graft versus host disease (in people receiving bone marrow transplants). Thalidomide is currently being investigated for other uses as well.

HOW should this drug be taken?

The dose range may vary from 100 to 300 mg daily. Since each person responds differently to medical treatments, your doctor will recommend the dose and duration of therapy that is best for you.

Thalidomide should be taken in the late afternoon or before bedtime since it may cause drowsiness. Thalidomide can be taken with or without food.

Your dosage:

50 mg capsule

___capsules(___mg)___times a day

What should you do if you FORGET a dose?

If you miss a dose of thalidomide, 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.

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

The most serious adverse effect of thalidomide is the potential to cause **birth defects**. It was found to cause deformed limbs in the children of women who took the drug early in pregnancy. Appropriate birth control methods must be used by people of child-bearing age who are taking thalidomide.

Thalidomide can cause **drowsiness, dizziness, sedation or mood changes**. If this is a problem for you, you may wish to take your dose late in the day or before bedtime.

Thalidomide can also cause **constipation, dry mouth, nausea, headache, increased appetite, swelling of the face and limbs, and abnormal menstrual bleeding**. Please inform your doctor or pharmacist if these symptoms appear and are bothersome.

Long-term use can cause **peripheral neuropathy**, which may lead to symptoms such as **tingling, burning, pain, or numbness in the hands and feet**. If this occurs, your thalidomide dose may need to be reduced or stopped.

Some people may experience an **allergic reaction** to thalidomide. If you have any of the following symptoms soon after taking thalidomide, STOP taking the drug and tell

your doctor **IMMEDIATELY**: sudden difficulties breathing, chest pain or tightening, swelling of eyelids, face or lips, fever, skin rash or "hives" anywhere on the body.

Finally, thalidomide may cause **neutropenia** (a decrease in the number of neutrophils so that you have a higher risk of bacterial infection). Your doctor will verify your neutrophil count when checking your blood work. Please inform your doctor if you develop a fever, chills, sore throat or a persistent cough.

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?

To avoid the development of birth defects, you should do the following:

- **For women**, starting 1 month before the start of thalidomide and up to 1 month after the end of the treatment, use **2** effective methods of contraception (birth control pill **and** a barrier method such as condoms). Alternatively, abstain from sexual activity that can result in becoming pregnant. Your doctor will do a pregnancy test before you start thalidomide and every month while you are on therapy. **Please stop thalidomide and notify your doctor if:**
 - your menstrual cycle is late or irregular
 - you have unexpected vaginal bleeding
 - you stop your birth control pill
 - you become pregnant

- you think, for any reason, that you might be pregnant
- For men, at the start of therapy and up to 1 month after the end of therapy, always use a condom when you have sexual activities with a woman.

Note: If you are infected by HIV, you should always use appropriate contraceptive methods (ie: condoms) to avoid passing HIV on to others.

Thalidomide may increase the effect of various drugs or substances. For example, it can increase the effects of alcohol and other central nervous system depressants such as sedatives, muscle relaxants, narcotics, drugs for seizures and antihistamines. Avoid taking alcohol while you are taking thalidomide. 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. In particular, your pharmacist will ensure that no drugs interfere with the efficacy of birth control pills.

As this drug may cause some people to become dizzy, drowsy or less alert than normal, you should NOT drive, use machinery or do anything else that could be dangerous if you are dizzy or are not alert.

Women should NOT breastfeed while receiving thalidomide and for at least 1 month after the end of the treatment.

How should this drug be STORED?

Thalidomide should be stored at room temperature 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 near the stove, 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: Drugdex drug evaluations Thalidomide. Thompson Micromedex® Health Care Services, Vol 115, 2003. 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

THALIDOMIDE

MEDICATION

FACT SHEET