

# ABACAVIR

**Other NAMES:** Ziagen®

Abacavir is also a part of these combination products:

- Kivexa® (abacavir/lamivudine)
- Trizivir® (abacavir/lamivudine/zidovudine)

## WHY is this drug prescribed?

Abacavir is an antiretroviral (anti-HIV) drug that is part of the nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NRTIs or 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<sup>+</sup> count) and you will be better protected against infections.

Abacavir 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 abacavir 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 300 mg twice daily or 600 mg once daily. It can be taken with or without food.

Your dosage is:

300 mg tablet:

\_\_\_\_ tablet ( \_\_\_\_ mg) \_\_\_\_ times a day

or

20 mg / mL oral solution:

\_\_\_\_ mL ( \_\_\_\_ mg) \_\_\_\_ times a day

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

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

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

Most adverse effects reported are mild and may include nausea, headache, muscle pain or decreased energy.

Rarely, a severe reaction called a **HYPERSENSITIVITY REACTION** can occur with abacavir (4 % of patients). This reaction usually occurs in the first 6 weeks of taking abacavir. Many, but not all people, will develop a **skin rash**. This reaction can also include **flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, muscle and joint aches, fatigue and a general feeling of being unwell**. Other possible symptoms that may accompany this reaction are **nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, mouth sores, skin blistering, swelling of the neck, eyes and tongue, red eyes, shortness of breath, coughing, sore throat and low blood pressure**.

**Notify your doctor immediately if you develop a rash or two other symptoms listed above while taking abacavir.** You will need to be assessed, and the drug may need to be stopped permanently. **If you are told to stop abacavir, you must NEVER take abacavir again since doing so could cause a life-threatening reaction. You must also NEVER take Trizivir® or Kivexa®, as these drugs also contain abacavir.**

If you cannot reach your doctor or pharmacist, you can also reach the Canadian Ziagen® Support Line which is a

24 hour toll-free bilingual line. The phone number is 1-800-868-8898.

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

Certain drugs can increase or decrease the effect of abacavir. Also, abacavir 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?**

Abacavir should be stored in a cool (2 - 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 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. Ziagen® (abacavir). Mississauga, ON, Canada: GlaxoSmithKline, 2008. Prepared by the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional Specialty Group, 2005. Reviewed 2009.

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

***ABACAVIR***

***MEDICATION***

***FACT SHEET***