

# NELFINAVIR

**Other NAMES:** Viracept®

## WHY is this drug prescribed?

Nelfinavir 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.

Nelfinavir 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.

Nelfinavir 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 nelfinavir 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?

Nelfinavir is available as a 250 mg blue tablet, or 625 mg white tablet. It is also available as a powder, where 1 gram of powder contains 50 mg of nelfinavir. 1 gram of powder is equal to one level spoonful of powder (spoon provided with the powder).

The recommended dose of nelfinavir is 1250 mg (two x 625 mg tablets) twice daily or 750mg (3 x 250mg tablets) three times daily. **It should be taken with food, either a meal or light snack.**

Your dosage is:

- 625 mg tablet  
\_\_\_\_ tablets (\_\_\_\_mg) \_\_\_\_ times a day
- 250 mg tablet  
\_\_\_\_ tablets (\_\_\_\_mg) \_\_\_\_ times a day
- 50 mg nelfinavir / g powder  
\_\_\_\_ level spoonfuls (\_\_\_\_mg) \_\_\_\_ times a day (use spoon given with powder)

Once you have measured the dose, the powder may be mixed with a small amount of water, milk, soy formula or dietary products. Avoid mixing the powder with acidic foods or drinks (orange, apple juice or applesauce) as the resulting mixture is very bitter. Once mixed, the entire contents of the glass must be taken to obtain the full dose. The mixture is stable for 6 hours. Crushed tablets may be used if no powder product is available. 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 nelfinavir, 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 nelfinavir, 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 nelfinavir to stop being active. A phenomenon known as **resistance**. When this happens, other antiretrovirals that work in a similar way as nelfinavir may also

become inactive. **Therefore, missing doses of nelfinavir can decrease treatment options for the future.** Even if you do not feel well, you should always take your doses of nelfinavir. Please do not stop nelfinavir without talking to your doctor first.

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

The most common side effect with nelfinavir is **diarrhea**. This can usually be controlled with non-prescription drugs, such as loperamide (Imodium®). Other side effects that may occur are nausea, intestinal gas and rash. If these effects occur and are bothersome, 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 nelfinavir 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 nelfinavir 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 nelfinavir than what is prescribed, you may increase the chance of having adverse effects. If you take lower doses of nelfinavir than what is prescribed, the HIV virus may become resistant to nelfinavir.

Certain drugs can increase or decrease the effect of nelfinavir. Also, nelfinavir 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 medications with nelfinavir:**

- Amiodarone (Cordarone®)
- Ergot derivatives [Ergotamine (Cafergot®, Bellergal®, Ergodryl™, Gravergol®), ergonovine, dihydroergotamine (Migranal®), methylergonovine (Methergine®)]
- Lovastatin (Mevacor®)
- Midazolam (Versed®)
- Omeprazole (Losec®)
- Pimozide (Orap®)
- Quinidine (Biquin Durules®)
- Rifampin (e.g. Rifadin®, Rimactane®, Rofact™)
- Simvastatin (Zocor®)
- Triazolam (Halcion®)

The efficacy of birth control pills or other hormones used to prevent becoming pregnant may decrease if you are taking nelfinavir. A second method of contraception should **always** be used. In general, even if you are not taking nelfinavir, the use of condoms is always recommended to decrease the risk of passing HIV on to others.

The safety of nelfinavir 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?**

Nelfinavir tablets and powder 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 Viracept® (nelfinavir mesylate). Mississauga, ON, Canada: Pfizer Canada Inc., 2008. Prepared by the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional Specialty Group, 2009.

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

# ***NELFINAVIR***

## ***MEDICATION***

### ***FACT SHEET***