

VALACYCLOVIR

Other names: Valtrex®

WHY is this drug prescribed?

Valacyclovir is an antiviral agent used to treat infections such as genital herpes (HSV) and herpes zoster (shingles). Herpes simplex causes small, fluid-filled blisters that break down into ulcers/sores that may be itchy or painful. These blisters contain many infectious herpes simplex virus particles. Valacyclovir helps stop the virus from spreading, reduces the number of painful blisters and also helps them to heal more quickly. If you start taking valacyclovir as soon as you feel an episode starting, it may be possible to actually prevent the blisters from developing. It may also be used in the prevention of recurrences of genital herpes.

Valacyclovir is still a relatively new antiviral agent and is not currently approved for use in patients who are immunosuppressed (ie. advanced HIV disease, kidney and bone marrow transplant).

HOW should this drug be taken?

Valacyclovir is available as 250, 500 and 1000 mg tablets. The dose of valacyclovir will depend on whether your doctor has prescribed the drug for the treatment of shingles or for genital herpes. The dose may need to be adjusted if you have kidney problems.

The recommended dose used to treat recurrent genital herpes infections is 500 mg twice daily for 3 days.

The recommended dose of valacyclovir used to treat shingles in adults is 1000 mg three times daily for 7 days.

In both cases, therapy should be started as early as possible following onset of signs and symptoms.

The recommended dose to prevent recurrent infections of genital herpes is 500 to 1000 mg once daily.

Your dosage is:

- 250 mg tablet
- 500 mg tablet
- 1000 mg tablet

____ tablet (____ mg) ____ times a day

You may take valacyclovir with or without food. Swallow each tablet whole with water. Do not chew it. It is important to finish all the tablets you have been given even if you start to feel better.

What should you do if you FORGET a dose ?

If you miss a dose of valacyclovir take it as soon as possible, then just carry on with your regular dosing schedule. If you remember your missed dose close to the time for your next dose (ie. within 2 hours), do not double your dose. Continue with your regular dosing schedule.

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

Valacyclovir is generally well tolerated. **Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, dizziness, or headache** may occur. If these effects occur and are bothersome, let your doctor or pharmacist know. Call your doctor immediately if you experience adverse effects such as **unusual bruising or bleeding** or if you think you have an **allergic reaction (ie. rash)** to valacyclovir.

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?

Herpes infections cause painful blisters on the skin. The fluid in these blisters contains the virus which causes the disease. The infections can be easily spread to you or other people. If you touch your skin sores, wash your hands immediately afterwards. Avoid intimate contact with others when the disease is visible.

Let your doctor know if you have had an allergic reaction or adverse effect to other antiviral agents such as famciclovir (Famvir®), acyclovir (Zovirax®), ganciclovir (Cytovene®), or valganciclovir (Valcyte™).

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

It is especially important to let them know if you are taking probenecid (Benemid®), cimetidine (Tagamet®), steroids (eg. prednisone) or any anti-cancer drugs before starting valacyclovir.

Since valacyclovir is removed from the body by your kidneys, it is important to inform your doctor if you have kidney problems prior to taking this drug. Also tell your doctor if you have HIV, AIDS, or any kind of bone marrow disease.

The safety of valacyclovir has not been established during pregnancy or breastfeeding. Please discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist if this is a concern.

How should this drug be STORED?

Valacyclovir should be stored in a cool (15-30°C) dry place, protected from light and well out of the reach of children. Do not store in the bathroom or kitchen, as heat and moisture may cause the drug to be less active.

Ensure that the drug has not expired by checking the expiry date ("EXP") shown on the outside of the package.

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 Valtrex® (valacyclovir). Mississauga, ON, Canada: GlaxoSmithKline, 2008. Prepared by the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional Specialty Group, 2003. Updated 2009.

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

VALACYCLOVIR

MEDICATION

FACT SHEET