

ABACAVIR (ZIAGEN)

USE:

Abacavir is an antiretroviral drug in a class called Nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (NRTIs). It is used in combination with other anti-retroviral drugs in the treatment of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infections. Abacavir is not a cure for HIV. Abacavir may also be used to treat other conditions determined by your doctor.



AVAILABLE AS: 300 milligram tablets; oral solution as 20mg/ml; Abacavir is also available in Trizivir (300mg zidovudine, 150mg lamivudine, and 300mg abacavir)

HOW TO USE THIS MEDICATION:

Take this medication exactly as directed by your doctor. Do not stop taking this medication on your own without first consulting a physician. Normal **adult dosing** for this medication is one tablet (300mg) twice a day. Dosing for children is based on the child's weight and will be determined by your doctor. It is recommended to be used in combination with other antiretroviral drugs.

This medication can be taken with or without food. It is advised to drink plenty of water while taking this medication.

Store your medication in a cool, dry place away from excessive heat, cold, light or moisture. The liquid medication may be stored in the refrigerator but do not freeze it. Keep medication out of the reach of children.

It is very important to take every dose of your medication in order for it to work correctly. If you do miss a dose of abacavir, take it as soon as you remember unless it is close to your next dose. Do not take two doses at once. If you think you may have taken too much of your medication, contact your local poison control center or emergency room right away.

WARNING: Fatal allergic reactions have been reported with the use of this drug. Immediately call for medical attention and stop taking the medication if you experience flu-like symptoms such as fever, skin rash, fatigue, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, cough, or severe gastrointestinal symptoms (abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting). By no means should this medication ever be attempted again if you experience these symptoms. You will be given a card that describes this type of reaction. Carry this card with you at all times.

CONTRAINDICATIONS:

Do not use abacavir if you have had a prior allergic reaction to abacavir (as Ziagen or Trizivir) or any of the components of the medication

SIDE EFFECTS:

Side effects that may go away with time include dizziness or weakness (use caution when driving or engaging in other tasks requiring alertness); and nausea or vomiting (eat small, more frequent meals or ask your doctor what medications you can take to manage these side effects). Other temporary side effects may include headaches, trouble sleeping, high blood pressure, or a general sense of feeling ill.

Check with your doctor as soon as possible if you experience abdominal swelling, decreased appetite, fast and shallow breathing, or sleepiness. Also you may experience changes in distribution of body fat. This may involve loss of fat from the arms, legs and face or increased fat around the neck, breasts, trunk and upper back. Exercise may decrease the chances of this side effect occurring.

Warning: Contact your doctor immediately if you experience any of the conditions listed below. Stop taking abacavir and seek medical attention immediately if you think you are having the allergic reaction described above in “how to use this medication.” Abacavir can cause rare but serious conditions of lactic acidosis and liver problems. Symptoms of lactic acidosis and liver problems include fever, skin rash, fatigue, persistent nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal pain, trouble breathing, sore throat, cough, headache, weakness or tiredness. Also notify your doctor if you notice an irregular or slow heartbeat, dark urine, swelling of the arms or legs, or weight gain.

Notify your doctor if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or breastfeeding. Abacavir’s effects on an unborn baby are still unclear. People with HIV should never breastfeed because of the risk of transmitting HIV to the infant.

This medication does not prevent the transmission of HIV to other people. Make sure you understand and practice safe sex and do not share needles with anyone.

DRUG INTERACTIONS:

Alcohol can increase the effects of abacavir and should be avoided. Abacavir may also decrease the amount of methadone in your system which may require a change in dose of methadone if these medications are used together.

Abacavir is not recommended to be used alone in the treatment of HIV and will most likely be used with other antiretroviral medications. Abacavir may increase the amount of amprenavir (Agenerase) in your system. Combination therapy with other anti-HIV drugs is generally well tolerated but may increase the chances of a reaction called lactic acidosis. Make sure your doctor is aware of all medications you have taken and are taking for HIV or other medical conditions.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about any medications including over the counter, herbal, vitamin, and prescription products before using them with abacavir.

References: see references 1-4