

EFAVIRENZ (SUSTIVA, EFV)

USE:

Efavirenz is an antiretroviral drug in a class called non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs). It is used in combination with other antiretroviral drugs to treat HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infections. This drug is not a cure for HIV.

AVAILABLE AS: 50, 100, and 200 milligram (mg) capsules; 600mg tablet



HOW TO USE THIS MEDICATION:

It is important to take your medication exactly as directed by your doctor. The normal adult dose of efavirenz is 600mg once daily. Take the medication at bedtime to minimize daytime side effects. Efavirenz can be taken with or without food and with plenty of water. Avoid taking efavirenz with a high fat meal. Dosing for children is based on body weight and will be determined by your doctor. Do not stop taking your medication without consulting your doctor.

Your doctor may want you to have blood or urine tests while taking efavirenz. Be sure to keep all of your appointments.

It is important to take every dose of efavirenz. If a dose is missed, it should be taken as soon as possible 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.

This medication should be stored in a cool, dry place. Avoid storing this medication in extreme heat, cold or moisture. Always keep medication out of the reach of children.

CONTRAINDICATIONS:

Do not take efavirenz if you have had an allergic reaction to nevirapine (Viramune) or any of its components. Efavirenz should not be taken with certain medications that are listed under “drug interactions.”

SIDE EFFECTS:

Side effects that may go away with time include a mild rash; joint or muscle pain; mild diarrhea, vomiting, or stomach upset; dizziness or tiredness; trouble sleeping or concentrating; or strange dreams. Avoid activities that may be dangerous, such as driving or operating machinery when taking this medication until you know how it will affect you. Changes in body fat have also been seen with efavirenz. Notify your doctor if you notice loss of fat from the legs, arms and face or increased fat in the upper back and neck, breast, and around the trunk. Exercise may decrease the risk of this side effect.

Warning: Contact your doctor immediately if you experience any of the symptoms listed below. Stop taking the medication immediately and seek medical attention if you have an allergic reaction to efavirenz (itching or hives, tightness in the chest, or trouble breathing). Tell your doctor right away if you have a rash that is accompanied with blisters, peeling skin, fever, swelling in the face, tingling in the mouth or throat, or weakness. Some patients will experience severe psychiatric symptoms including depression, suicide attempts, aggressive behavior, delusions, paranoia and psychosis-like symptoms. Tell your doctor immediately if you feel any of these symptoms. Alcohol can intensify these side effects and should be avoided. Other important side effects to watch out for are fast, pounding heartbeat; problems with balance or walking; sudden and severe stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, fever, or lightheadedness; dark-colored urine, pale stools, or yellow skin or eyes. Tell your doctor if you have liver problems or hepatitis, have ever had a mental illness, or are using drugs or alcohol.

Notify your doctor if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or breastfeeding. The effects of efavirenz 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:

Efavirenz is broken down by the liver. This means that efavirenz can interact with other medications. Medications that should not be taken with efavirenz include astemizole (Hismanal), cisapride (Propulsid), midazolam (Versed), triazolam (Halcion) and ergot medications (Wigraine, Cafergot). The herbal supplement St. John's wort (*hypericum perforatum*) should also be avoided because it can lower the effectiveness of efavirenz. Make sure your doctor knows if you are taking any of the following medications: clarithromycin (Biaxin), rifabutin (Mycobutin), rifampin (Rifadin, Rifamate, Rifater), warfarin (Coumadin), estrogen hormone replacement, methadone, amprenavir (Agenerase), indinavir (Crixivan), saquinavir (Fortovase, Invirase), or ritonavir (Norvir). These drugs may need to be used with caution or dose adjusted when given with efavirenz. Birth control pills may be less effective when used together with Efavirenz. Ask your doctor about using alternative forms of birth control. Efavirenz can cause someone to test positive for marijuana. If you have to submit a urine sample for a drug test, tell the person collecting the sample that you are taking efavirenz.

Efavirenz may not be as effective in patients who have unsuccessfully taken nevirapine (Viramune) or delavirdine (Rescriptor), the other two medications in the class of drugs called NNRTIs. This decreased effectiveness is a result of a mutation in the genetic structure of HIV that makes the virus resistant to these medications

Make sure your doctor is aware of any medications you are using including over the counter items, herbals, vitamins and prescription products. Ask your doctor or pharmacist before using any medication with efavirenz.

References: see references 21-24