

## NELFINAVIR (VIRACEPT)

### USE:

Nelfinavir is an antiretroviral drug in a class called protease inhibitors. It is used in combination with other antiretroviral drugs in the treatment of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infections. This drug is not a cure for HIV.

AVAILABLE AS: 250 milligram(mg) tablets; Oral powder as 50mg/g (5 scoops=250mg)



### 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. The normal dose of nelfinavir is 750mg (three 250mg tablets) three times daily or 1250mg (five 250mg tablets) twice a day. Dosing for children will depend on their body weight and will be determined by your doctor. Nelfinavir should be taken with a meal or light snack and a full glass of water.

Your doctor may want you to have occasional blood tests. Make sure you keep all of your appointments.

If you cannot swallow the tablet whole, it can be dissolved in a small amount of water or crush it and mix it with a small amount of food. The powder should be measured using the measuring scoop provided to get the most accurate dose. Mix the powder with a small amount of water, milk, soy milk, baby formula or dietary supplement drink. Do not mix with acidic beverages (orange or cranberry juice) because it will cause a bad taste. Consume these mixtures right after preparing them. If you cannot take the mixture right away, it can be stored in the refrigerator and must be used within six hours.

Nelfinavir should be stored in a cool, dry place away from excessive heat, cold, light or moisture. Always 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 nelfinavir, 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.

### CONTRAINDICATIONS:

Do not take nelfinavir if you have had a prior allergic reaction to nelfinavir (Viracept) or any component of the medication. You should not take nelfinavir if you are also taking astemizole (Hismanal), cisapride (Propulsid), triazolam (Halcion), midazolam (Versed), ergot medications (Cafergot, Wigraine), amiodarone (Cordarone), or quinidine.

### SIDE EFFECTS:

The most common side effect of nelfinavir is diarrhea. This side effect will most likely go away with time and can be managed with anti-diarrhea medication. Other side effects that will probably go away with time include headache, tiredness, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite or gas. Talk to your doctor if you experience muscle or joint pain, mood changes, weight gain or redistribution of body fat. Body fat changes may include loss of fat from the face, legs and arms or increased fat in the upper back, neck, breast and abdomen. Talk to your doctor about ways to manage these side effects with diet, exercise or medication.

**Warning: Contact your doctor immediately if you experience any of the conditions listed below.** Stop taking nelfinavir immediately and seek medical attention if you experience an allergic reaction (difficulty breathing; closing of your throat; swelling of your lips, tongue, or face; or hives). Medications in this class of drugs have been shown to cause diabetes or worsen pre-existing diabetes. This class of drug may also cause people who have hemophilia (bleeding disorder) to have increased bleeding. Your doctor will probably want you to have occasional blood tests. Make sure you keep these appointments. Tell your doctor if you have liver problems, diabetes, phenylketonuria (PKU) or hemophilia before beginning nelfinavir.

Notify your doctor if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or breastfeeding. Nelfinavir is not expected to harm an unborn baby but should be used with caution in pregnancy. 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:**

Nelfinavir should not be taken with the medications listed under “contraindications.” Talk to your doctor before taking lovastatin (Mevacor), pravastatin (Pravachol), atorvastatin (Lipitor), simvastatin (Zocor), Rifampin (Rimactane), rifabutin (Mycobutin), phenobarbital, phenytoin (Dilantin), carbamazepine (Tegretol), or sildenafil (Viagra). Nelfinavir may also cause birth control pills to be less effective. Talk to your doctor about other methods of birth control. Also, the herbal supplement St. John’s wort (*hypericum perforatum*) should be avoided because it can decrease the amount of nelfinavir in your system. Nelfinavir may also interact with other anti-HIV medications and may need to be used with caution or have an adjusted dose. Make sure your doctor knows if you are also taking ritonavir (Norvir), indinavir (Crixivan), or saquinavir (Invirase, Fortovase).

**This is not a complete list of interactions. Make sure your doctor knows all of the medication you are taking. Also, ask your doctor or pharmacist about any medications including over the counter, herbal, vitamin, and prescription products before using them with nelfinavir.**

**References:** see references 37-39