

SAQUINAVIR (INVIRASE, FORTOVASE)

USE:

Saquinavir 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: 200 milligram (mg) capsules (Invirase); 200mg soft gel capsules (Fortovase)



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. Saquinavir comes in two different forms as Invirase and Fortovase. These medications should not be used interchangeably. The normal adult dose for Invirase is three 200mg capsules (600mg) three times daily within 2 hours after a full meal. Fortovase is taken either as eight 200mg capsules (1600mg) twice daily or six 200mg capsules (1200mg) three times daily within two hours after a meal. Both forms of the medication should be taken with a full glass of water. Your doctor may want you to have occasional blood tests. Make sure you keep all of your appointments.

Invirase should be stored in a cool, dry place away from excessive heat, cold, light or moisture. Fortovase needs to be stored in the refrigerator 2 to 8 degrees C (36 to 46 degrees F). Once at room temperature, Fortovase must be used within 3 months or before its expiration date (whichever comes first). 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 saquinavir, 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 saquinavir if you have had a prior allergic reaction to saquinavir (as Invirase or Fortovase) or any component of the medication. Also, do not take saquinavir if you are taking astemizole (Hismanal), cisapride (Propulsid), terfenadine (Seldane), triazolam (Halcion), midazolam (Versed), or ergot medications (Cafergot or Wigraine).

SIDE EFFECTS:

Side effects that may go away with time include diarrhea, upset stomach, nausea, headache, heartburn, anxiety, sleepiness or mild rash. Other side effects you should talk to your doctor about include numbness or tingling in a body part, muscle or skeletal aches or pains, depression, taste changes, and mouth ulcers or sores. You may also experience changes in body fat. This 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 saquinavir 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). Saquinavir has also been associated with the rare but serious conditions of pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) and liver damage. Signs of liver damage include yellowing of the skin or eyes, nausea, abdominal pain or discomfort, unusual bleeding or bruising and severe tiredness. Pancreatitis may cause severe nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. Also call your doctor right away if you experience numbness, tingling, burning or pain in your hands or feet; unusual bruising or bleeding; or seizures. Liver function may decline while taking saquinavir. Also, diabetes (new onset or worsening of existing diabetes) and increased blood sugar levels may happen with this class of drugs. It is important to keep all of your appointments for blood tests in order to catch these side effects early. Make sure your doctor knows if you have a history of liver disease, diabetes or hemophilia (excessive bleeding).

Notify your doctor if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or breastfeeding. Saquinavir 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:

Saquinavir is broken down by the liver. This means many drugs can interact with your medication. It is very important to tell your doctor **all** of the medications you are taking including over the counter, herbal, vitamin and prescription products. Avoid medications listed under “contraindications.”

Other medications may need to be avoided or you may need a change in the dose of your medications. Make sure your doctor knows if you are taking rifampin (Rifadin, Rimactane), rifabutin (Mycobutin), clarithromycin (Biaxin), delavirdine (Rescriptor), phenobarbital, phenytoin (Dilantin), carbamazepine (Tegretol), dexamethasone (Decadron, Hexadrol), ketoconazole (Nizoral), itraconazole (Sporanox), clindamycin (Cleocin), or quinidine. Other HIV medications may interact with saquinavir including indinavir (Crixivan), delavirdine (Rescriptor), or nevirapine (Viramune). The cholesterol medications atorvastatin (Lipitor), pravastatin (Pravachol), lovastatin (Mevacor) and simvastatin (Zocor) may also interact with saquinavir, causing unwanted serious side effects. Birth control may be less effective when taken with saquinavir. Ask your doctor about other forms of birth control.

The herbal drug St. John’s wort should not be taken with saquinavir. Grapefruit juice may also interact with saquinavir and its consumption should be minimized or avoided.

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 saquinavir.

References: see references 48-53