



plain and simple facts

# DRUG INFORMATION



## AZT (zidovudine, Retrovir)

### Why am I given AZT as my medication?

- AZT (also called zidovudine or Retrovir) is a drug that is used in combination with other drugs to treat HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection.
- AZT is also found in the anti-HIV drugs Combivir and Trizivir.
- AZT blocks a protein called “reverse transcriptase.” As a result, it belongs to a class of drugs called Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (RTIs). The HIV virus needs this protein to reproduce itself, so by blocking it the drug helps slow down HIV disease.
- Taking this medication can reduce the amount of virus in your body. It can also reduce your chance of getting sick from AIDS-related illnesses, help you stay healthy longer or get your health back. It may also reduce the damage to your immune system.

### How do I take this medication?

- AZT comes in 100 mg capsules or 300 mg tablets.
- AZT is usually taken as 300 mg twice daily. AZT can be taken with or without food.
- AZT should be stored at room temperature in a dry place. Avoid putting the medicine in the bathroom or kitchen, as moisture may cause the medicine to lose its effectiveness.
- Keep it out of reach of children.

### What if I forget to take a dose?

- Take the dose you missed as soon as possible. However, if it is within 2 hours of your next dose, just continue with your regular schedule. Do not double the dose.
- Recent studies have found that for the anti-HIV medications to work, all the medications need to be taken regularly and consistently. Missing or skipping dose of your medication may make it lose its effectiveness as the virus can change itself and become resistant to the medication.

### What are the side effects of AZT?

- The most serious side effects of AZT are:
  - ~ anemia (a drop in your red blood cells that can make you feel tired or short of breath)
  - ~ leukopenia ( a drop in your white blood cell that can increase your risk of bacterial infection)

These side effects usually happen after you have been on AZT for many months. Going for regular appointments with your doctor will help you check for these problems.

- Other common side effects of AZT can include:
  - ~ headache
  - ~ fatigue
  - ~ dizziness
  - ~ stomach upset
  - ~ muscle aches
  - ~ colour change in your nails
  - ~ difficulty sleeping
- If you are experiencing side effects from the medication, call your doctor or pharmacist to discuss your symptoms. Do not stop the medication before you talk to your doctor or pharmacist. They may have suggestions of how you can manage the side effects without stopping the medication.

### **Can I take AZT with other medications?**

- AZT can interact with other drugs. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the prescription and non-prescription medications (including vitamins and herbs) that you are taking.
- AZT should not be taken together with d4T (stavudine/Zerit).
- Other common drugs that you should be careful about when taking AZT include methadone and hydroxyurea (Hydrea).

### **Can I take AZT with alcohol or street drugs?**

- In general, it is advisable to avoid excessive amount of alcohol and street drugs while you are taking anti-HIV medications. Alcohol may interact with some of your medications. Do not skip a dose of your medication because you want a drink.

### **Can I take AZT if I am pregnant or breast-feeding?**

- AZT has been shown to reduce HIV transmission during pregnancy. If you are pregnant and HIV positive, please consult your doctor about taking medication.
- Since the HIV virus can be transmitted through breast milk, breast-feeding is not recommended in HIV-positive women.

### **What other precautions do I need to know when taking AZT?**

- Keep your appointments with your doctor to check your blood regularly.
- Make sure you have a continuous supply of the medication.
- AZT does not kill the virus or cure AIDS. It also does not prevent the transmission of HIV, so please remember to always take precautions if you are having sex (use latex condoms) or using drugs (use clean syringes).



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**Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV-related illness and the treatments in question.**



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