



plain and simple facts

# DRUG INFORMATION



## Abacavir (Ziagen)

### Why am I given abacavir s my medication?

- Abacavir (also called Ziagen) is a drug that is used in combination with other drugs to treat HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection.
- Abacavir is also found in the anti-HIV drug Trizivir.
- Abacavir 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?

- Abacavir comes in 300 mg tablets and as a liquid (20 mg/ml). The usual dose of abacavir is 300 mg twice a day. abacavir can be taken with or without food.
- Abacavir should be kept 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 doses 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 abacavir ?

- The most serious side effect of abacavir is a hypersensitivity reaction that has the symptoms of a flu-like illness. This happens in about 3% of people who take abacavir and can be fatal. Symptoms can include fever and chills, muscle and joint pain, fatigue and feeling rundown, nausea and vomiting, skin rash or shortness of breath. If you have two or more of the above symptoms, call your doctor right away. Do not stop the medication before you talk to your health service providers.

- Other common side effects of abacavir can include:

- ~ skin rash
- ~ fatigue
- ~ headache
- ~ insomnia
- ~ diarrhea
- ~ nausea
- ~ vomiting
- ~ muscle pain

Consult your physician or pharmacist if you have these side effects.

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

- Abacavir can interact with other drugs. It is important that you tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the prescription and non-prescription medications (including vitamins and herbs) that you are taking.
- Other drugs that may interact with abacavir include: Antabuse, Parafon Forte, chloral hydrate and isoniazid. Consult your physician or pharmacist before taking these medications.

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

- Avoid alcohol if you are on abacavir. Alcohol may increase the level of abacavir and its side effects.
- Abacavir may also interact with other street drugs, so consult your doctor and pharmacist if you are using street drugs so they can advise you with the necessary precautions.

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

- If you are pregnant and wish to take abacavir, consult your doctor or pharmacist 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 abacavir?**

- Keep your appointments with your physician for blood tests to check your liver and kidney function regularly.
- Make sure you have a continuous supply of the medication.
- Abacavir 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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