



plain and simple facts

# DRUG INFORMATION



## Ritonavir (Norvir)

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

- Ritonavir (also called Norvir) is a drug used in combination with other medications to treat HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection.
- Ritonavir blocks a protein called “protease.” It belongs to a class of drugs called protease inhibitors (PIs). 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?

- Ritonavir comes as a 100 mg capsule and 80mg/c.c. liquid. The usual dose of ritonavir is 600 mg (6 capsules or 7.5 c.c. of the liquid) twice daily.
- Ritonavir should be taken with food.
- To reduce side effects, ritonavir should be started at a lower dose and increased gradually over 2 weeks (for example, 300 mg twice daily for 3 days, then 400 mg twice daily for 3 days, then 500 mg twice daily for 3 days, then 600 mg twice daily).
- Ritonavir may be used at a lower dose if it is combined with another protease inhibitor.
- The oral solution can be taken alone or with other fluids to improve its taste. You can mix the ritonavir liquid with a cup of chocolate milk, Ensure, Advera or ice cream. Mix only one dose at a time. After mixing, the liquid should be taken within one hour.
- Ritonavir should be kept at room temperature away from direct sunlight.
- Ritonavir capsules can be left at room temperature for 30 days. Store extra amounts of ritonavir in the refrigerator.
- 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 and become resistant to the medication.

## What are the side effects of ritonavir?

- The most common side effects of ritonavir include:
  - ~ stomach upset
  - ~ nausea and vomiting
  - ~ diarrhea
  - ~ loss of appetite, taste changes
  - ~ dizziness, headache
  - ~ fatigue
  - ~ tingling and numbness in hands, feet or around the lips
- Longer-term side effects of ritonavir can include:
  - ~ an increase in the sugar and fat (cholesterol, triglyceride) levels in your blood
  - ~ abnormal body fat distribution (increase in waist and breast size and thinning of the face, arms and legs)
- Consult your doctor or pharmacist if you have these side effects. Do not stop the medication or change the dose before talking to them.

## Can I take ritonavir with other medications?

- Ritonavir can interact with other drugs. It is important to tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the prescription and non-prescription medications (including vitamins and herbs) you are taking.
- Ritonavir should not be taken with: Halcion (triazolam), Versed (midazolam), Hismanal (astemizole), Seldane (terfenadine), Prepulse (cisapride), Xanax (alprazolam), Cordarone (amiodarone), Tranxene (clorazepate), Clorzaryl (clozapine), Valium (diazepam), Enkaid (encainide), Prosom (estazolam), Tambocor (flecainide), Dalmene (flurazepam), Demerol (meperidine), Feldene (piroxicam), Rythmol (propafenone), Darvon (propoxyphene), quinidine, and Mycobutin (rifabutin).
- Ritonavir can decrease the effectiveness of birth control pills. An alternative method for birth control, such as latex condoms, should be used if you are on ritonavir.
- Ritonavir may reduce the effectiveness of methadone. Your methadone dosage may need to be adjusted if you are on ritonavir.

## Can I take ritonavir with alcohol or street drugs?

- In general, it is advisable to avoid excessive amounts of alcohol 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.
- Ritonavir will also interact with street drugs (eg. ecstasy). Consult your doctor or pharmacist if you are using street drugs so they can advise you with the necessary precautions.

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

- If you are pregnant and wish to take Ritonavir, please consult your doctor.
- Since the HIV virus can be transmitted through breast milk, breast-feeding is not recommended in HIV-positive women.



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

- Keep your appointments with your physician for blood tests to check your liver and kidney function, blood sugar, cholesterol and triglyceride levels regularly.
- Make sure you have a continuous supply of the medication.
- Ritonavir does not kill the virus or cure AIDS. It also does not prevent the transmission of HIV, so 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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