



HIV Drug Information



Efavirenz (Sustiva)

Why am I efavirenz as my medication?

- Efavirenz (also called Sustiva) is a drug that is used in combination with other drugs to treat HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection.
- Efavirenz blocks a protein called "reverse transcriptase." 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?

- Efavirenz comes in 200 mg and 600 mg capsules.
- The usual dose of efavirenz is 600 mg once a day in the evening or at bedtime.
- Efavirenz can be taken with or without food.
- Efavirenz should be stored at room temperature in a dry place.
- Keep it out of reach of children.



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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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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 efavirenz?

- ☛ The main side effects of efavirenz are:
 - dizziness
 - drowsiness
 - difficulty sleeping
 - nightmares or vivid dreams
 - poor concentration
 - confusion

Taking the medication at bedtime will minimize the side effects. Usually these side effects improve with time.

- ☛ Efavirenz can also cause a skin rash. It usually appears in the first 2 weeks of therapy.
 - If the rash is mild, do not stop the medication before you talk to your doctor or pharmacist. They may have suggestions of how you can manage the rash without stopping the medication.
 - If the rash is severe — with symptoms of fever, sores in the mouth, muscle or joint pain, eye swelling or red eyes — stop taking the medication immediately and call your doctor or pharmacist right away.



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Can I take efavirenz with other medications?

- ☛ Efavirenz 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.
- ☛ Efavirenz can decrease the effectiveness of birth control pills. If you are taking efavirenz, you should use a different method for birth control.
- ☛ Efavirenz can affect the effectiveness of methadone and HIV drugs known as protease inhibitors:
 - saquinavir (Invirase & Fortovase)
 - indinavir (Crixivan)
 - ritonavir (Norvir)
 - nelfinavir (Viracept)
 - lopinavir (Kaletra)
 - amprenavir (Agenerase)

If you are taking efavirenz and any of these drugs together, their dosages may need to be adjusted

Can I take efavirenz with alcohol or street drugs?

- ☛ In general, it is advisable to avoid excessive amounts 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 efavirenz if I am pregnant or breast-feeding?

- ☛ Efavirenz must **never** be used by women who are or may become pregnant.
- ☛ 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 efavirenz?

- Keep regular appointments with your doctor for tests to check your liver function and the fat level in your blood.
- Make sure you have a continuous supply of the medication.
- Do not change the dose of your medication without discussing it with your doctor or pharmacist.
- Efavirenz 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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