



HIV Drug Information



Nelfinavir (Viracept)

Why am I given nelfinavir as my medication?

- ☛ Nelfinavir (also called Viracept) is a drug used in combination with other medications to treat HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection.
- ☛ Nelfinavir 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?

- ☛ Nelfinavir comes in 250 mg tablets. The usual dose of nelfinavir is 1,250 mg (5 tablets) twice daily or 750 mg (3 tablets) three times daily.
- ☛ Nelfinavir should be taken with food.
- ☛ Nelfinavir should be stored at room temperature in a dry place. Store it in its original container. Don't put the medicine in the bathroom or kitchen, as moisture may cause the medicine to lose its effectiveness.
- ☛ 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 nelfinavir?

- ☛ The most common side effect of nelfinavir is diarrhea. This can often be controlled with anti-diarrheal medications such as loperamide (Imodium) or anti-motility agents such as codeine. Taking a supplement of calcium (500 mg twice daily) or bulking agents (such as Metamucil and a high fibre diet) may also be helpful in controlling diarrhea.
- ☛ Other side effects can include:
 - stomach upset
 - nausea
 - gas
 - rash
- ☛ Longer-term side effects of nelfinavir may 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 arms and legs and face)

Consult your doctor or pharmacist if you have these side effects. Do not stop the medication or change the dose before you talk with them.



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Can I take nelfinavir with other medications?

- ☛ Nelfinavir 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. Nelfinavir should not be taken with: Halcion (triazolam), Versed (midazolam), Hismanal (astemizole), Seldane (terfenadine), Prepulsid (cisapride), Cordarone (amiodarone), Quinidine, Rifampin and migraine medications (eg. Ergomar, Cafergot).
- ☛ Nelfinavir 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 nelfinavir.

Can I take nelfinavir with alcohol or street drugs?

- ☛ It is advisable to avoid excessive amounts of alcohol while you are taking nelfinavir. Alcohol may interact with your medications. Do not skip a dose of your medication because you want a drink.
- ☛ Nelfinavir may also interact with street drugs. Consult your doctor or pharmacist if you are using street drugs so they can advise you with the necessary precautions.

Can I take nelfinavir if I am pregnant or breast-feeding?

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

What other precautions do I need to know when taking nelfinavir?

- ☛ Keep your appointments with your physician for blood tests to check your liver, pancreas and kidney function, blood sugar, and cholesterol and triglyceride levels regularly.
- ☛ Make sure you have a continuous supply of the medication.



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- ☛ Nelfinavir 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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