



**The Information Exchange**

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## ABACAVIR (Ziagen<sup>®</sup>)

Please read this factsheet carefully together with the patient information leaflet before taking your medicine. If you have any questions or are unsure about anything, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

Abacavir or 'Ziagen' belongs to a class of drugs called the **nucleoside analogues** or **nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors** (NRTIs). NRTIs are used for the treatment of HIV infection, in combination with other anti-HIV drugs. If you would like more information about how these drugs work in the body, a leaflet is available. Please ask the pharmacist for details.

### Before taking abacavir

Tell your doctor about:

- All other drugs that you are taking, including any that you buy over the counter in a community pharmacy, herbal medicines, and recreational drugs
- Any previous reaction to abacavir
- Any previous allergy to any other medicines
- If you have ever had any liver disease
- If you have ever had any kidney disease
- If you are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant

### Taking your abacavir

- Abacavir is available as a yellow tablet with "GX623" written on it, containing 300mg of abacavir. There is also a liquid preparation available containing 20mg in 1ml.
- Kivexa and Trizivir are combined pill preparations that also contain abacavir. For more information please read the separate fact sheets.
- The usual dose is 600mg daily administered either as 300mg twice daily (one tablet or 15mls twice daily) or 600mg daily (two tablets or 30mls once a day).
- The doses if taken once daily should be taken at the same time each day, twenty four hours apart. If taken twice daily should be spaced evenly throughout the day (as close as possible to twelve hours apart) and at the same times each day.
- There is no effect of food upon the absorption of abacavir therefore you can take the tablets before, with or after food.
- Abacavir works best if there is a constant amount in your bloodstream. It is therefore very important to take the tablets regularly. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember but DO NOT double up the next dose.

Do not run out of abacavir. If you are going on holiday and need additional supplies - tell your doctor. When receiving a supply from pharmacy, ensure that you have an adequate supply to last until your next appointment.

## Side effects

Abacavir, like all other medicines, has some side effects. The most frequent ones affecting more than 1 in 100 patients are:

- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Lethargy and fatigue (abnormal tiredness)
- Fever
- Headache
- Rash without other symptoms

Though many of these side-effects only last a short period of time, if you experience any of these side effects or any other symptoms after you start abacavir, tell your doctor who will advise you what to do.

In the experience to date with abacavir approximately 5% or 1 in 20 patients have developed an allergic or hypersensitivity reaction. This usually happens within the first six weeks of treatment, although these reactions may occur at any time during therapy. The HLA B5701 genetic test identifies patients most at risk for abacavir-related hypersensitivity reactions although you could still have a reaction even if this test was negative.

**YOU SHOULD CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY** for advice if:

1. You get a skin rash OR
2. You get one or more symptoms from at least two of the following groups:
  - fever
  - shortness of breath, sore throat or cough
  - nausea or vomiting or diarrhoea or abdominal pain
  - severe tiredness or aching joints or general ill feeling

Remember to carry the alert card (from the medication package) around with you at all times

**You should NOT stop taking abacavir without first speaking to your doctor. If you do stop abacavir due to this reaction you must never take abacavir again. There have been reports of more serious reactions in people who have stopped abacavir and then restarted after the symptoms disappeared.**

During working hours contact your doctor or the Kobler Pharmacy on 020 3315 6126 or after hours, Thomas Macauley Ward, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital on 020 3315 8540.

Lactic acidosis, a chemical disturbance of the blood, has been reported with the use of nucleoside analogues. Inform your doctor if you experience the following symptoms: nausea and vomiting, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, weight loss, rapid, deep breathing or muscle weakness.

## Admission to hospital

If you are admitted to hospital please bring all your medicines with you. This is so the nurses can continue to give them to you on the ward. This is especially important for anti-HIV medications as they need to be taken regularly.

## Storing your abacavir

Abacavir should be stored at room temperature.

This information was prepared by the HIV/GUM pharmacy department at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. If you have any queries regarding the information, please call Kobler Pharmacist on 020 3315 5604

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