



**The Information Exchange**

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## EFAVIRENZ (Sustiva®)

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

**Efavirenz**, also known as **Sustiva** or **EFV**, belongs to a class of drugs called **non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs)**. NNRTIs are used for the treatment of HIV infection, in combination with other anti-HIV drugs. Please speak to your clinic doctor or pharmacist if you would like more information about how these drugs work.

### Before taking efavirenz

Tell your doctor about:

- All other drugs (including inhalers) that you are taking, including any that you have on prescription, buy over the counter in your community pharmacy, herbal medicines and recreational drugs.
- Any previous allergy to any medicines.
- If you have ever had any liver disease.
- If you have a history of a mental health illness.
- If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy. **Efavirenz should not be taken by pregnant women unless recommended by your doctor as the most appropriate option.**
- If you are breastfeeding.

### Taking your efavirenz

- Efavirenz is available as a dark yellow capsule with "sustiva" and "200mg" written on it containing 200 mg of efavirenz and a dark yellow capsule-shaped tablet with "sustiva" written on it containing 600mg. Efavirenz is also available in a liquid formulation containing 30mg of efavirenz in a ml.
- The usual dose is 600mg once each day usually taken at night. If you are taking the liquid formulation, you need to take a slightly higher dose of 720mg (24mls). This is because the liquid form is not absorbed from the stomach as well as the capsule and tablet forms.
- The dose should be taken at the same time each day. You may take efavirenz at any time during the day, although taking it at bedtime may help to reduce the side-effects during the first few weeks.
- Efavirenz may be taken on an empty stomach (an hour before or 2 hour after a meal) preferably at bedtime . . . Because less drug absorbed when the drug is taken on an empty stomach there is some evidence to suggest that this may reduce the nervous system side effects (vivid dreams, hallucinations, dizziness etc.). If you find that you suffer from these side effects, try taking efavirenz on an empty stomach and avoiding high fat meals around bedtime.
- Efavirenz works best if there is a constant amount in your blood stream. It is therefore important to take it regularly. Try taking the dose as close as possible to twenty four hours apart, at the same time each day. 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 efavirenz. 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.

## **Other drugs and efavirenz**

Efavirenz is metabolised (processed in the body) by the liver. Some other drugs are metabolised in the same way. This is why it is important to tell your doctor about all the medicines that you take even if you only take them occasionally, including herbal and recreational drugs.

Examples of some drugs that are metabolised in the same way as efavirenz and therefore should **NOT** be taken are ergotamine, certain benzodiazepines and St. John's Wort. Other examples of drugs that are metabolised in the same way as efavirenz include phenytoin, phenobarbitone, carbamazepine, simvastatin, rifampicin, rifabutin, warfarin, methadone and the protease inhibitors. Your doctor may alter your doses if you are taking one of these drugs.

Efavirenz can stop certain hormonal contraceptives from working effectively, and you may need to use an alternative or additional form of contraception, e.g. barrier methods. Discuss this with your clinic doctor.

## **Side effects**

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

- Dizziness/light-headedness: If you are affected by these symptoms you should not drive or operate machinery. Dizziness and light-headedness is reduced if you take the dose at bedtime.
- Skin rash: Efavirenz can very rarely cause a severe skin reaction which is associated with blistering and ulceration. If you develop a rash you should consult your doctor immediately.
- Vivid dreams/nightmares: dreams occurs after the first dose and usually stop after a few days or weeks, although they can last for longer in some people. If they become troublesome try taking the dose earlier in the evening.
- Nausea
- Headache or fatigue
- Depression

If you experience any of these side effects or any other new symptoms after starting efavirenz, tell your doctor who will advise you what to do. If you decide to stop taking efavirenz it is important that you tell your doctor so that he or she can discuss other treatment options with you.

## **Stopping efavirenz therapy**

If you decide you would like to stop taking efavirenz it is very important that you discuss this with your doctor rather than stop on your own accord. Efavirenz can last for a long time in your bloodstream after you have stopped taking it – much longer than other drugs. This means that your body may be exposed to a single drug and your virus may become resistant. If you do wish to stop therapy you should discuss this with your doctor, so that it can be stopped in a controlled manner to minimise the risk of resistance which will mean you cannot use this or similar medicines again in future.

## **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 drugs, as they have to be taken regularly.

## **Storing you Efavirenz**

Efavirenz 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 0203315 5604

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