



## Zidovudine (AZT)

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

Zidovudine, also known as **AZT** or **Retrovir** belongs to a class of drugs called **nucleoside analogues or nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs)**. Nucleoside analogues 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 zidovudine

Tell you doctor about:

- All other drugs that you are taking, including any that you buy over the counter in a community pharmacy and herbal medicines
- 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 zidovudine

- Zidovudine is available as a capsule in two strengths 100mg or 250mg capsule. There is also a liquid preparation available containing 10mg in 1ml.
- The dose of Zidovudine may vary according to what preparation you are using. The usual dose of Zidovudine is 250mg twice daily.
- The doses should be divided equally throughout the day; try to take the doses as close as possible to twelve hours apart and at the same time each day.
- There is no effect of food on the absorption of zidovudine therefore you can take doses before, with or after food. Taking doses after food may help prevent nausea – this can occur when you first start taking zidovudine.
- Zidovudine works best if there is a constant amount in your bloodstream. It is therefore very important to take the doses regularly. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose anyway, forget about the missed dose. Wait and take the next dose at the regular time. Do not double the next dose.

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

## **Other drugs and zidovudine**

Due to its effect on your bone marrow, zidovudine can decrease some of your blood cells. Some other drugs used in HIV disease can also do this, for example ganciclovir and co-trimoxazole. Your doctor may decide to change some of your other medicines after starting zidovudine.

Zidovudine should NOT be taken with rifampicin as it decreases the levels of Zidovudine in your blood.

Zidovudine should not be taken in combination with Stavudine (D4T)

## **Side effects**

Zidovudine, like all other medicines, has some side effects. The most important ones are:

- Nausea & vomiting
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Muscle pain
- Lack of energy

These most commonly occur when you first start taking zidovudine and frequently disappear after 4 or 5 weeks of treatment. Side effects that may develop later include anaemia and skin and nail pigmentation. If you experience any of these side effects or any other new symptoms after you start zidovudine, tell your doctor who will advise you what to do. If you decide to stop taking zidovudine, it is important that you tell your doctor so that he or she can discuss other treatment options with you.

Combination antiretroviral therapy, in particular Zidovudine, has been associated with redistribution of body fat (lipodystrophy), including the loss of peripheral and facial subcutaneous fat and increased abdominal and back fat. If you experience these side effects tell your doctor who will advise you what to do

Lactic acidosis has been reported with the use of nucleoside analogues. Your doctor will be monitoring your lactate levels, but 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 especially important for anti-HIV medication as it has to be taken regularly. Thomas Macaulay Ward now operates a self medication programme. Some patients are able to self administer their own medicines to enable them to stick to the routine they have been used to at home.

## **Storing your zidovudine**

Zidovudine capsules, tablets and liquid should be stored at room temperature.