

Efavirenz

This leaflet is designed to give you a general idea of the most important things you need to know about your new medicine. It is not supposed to replace the patient information leaflet (PIL) that comes with the medicine, but is designed to be read in conjunction with it. If you have any questions or are unsure about anything, ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What is efavirenz?

Efavirenz belongs to a group of antiretroviral drugs called non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs), or 'non-nukes'.

Efavirenz is used for the treatment of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), in combination with other antiretrovirals. Please speak to your clinic doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you would like more information about how these drugs work.

How should I take efavirenz?

The recommended dose is one 600mg tablet once daily, on an empty stomach (1 hour before food, and 2 hours after food). Taking efavirenz with food doesn't affect how the medicines works; however, you may experience more side effects such as dizziness or drowsiness if you take it with food.

Efavirenz is also available in a liquid formulation, but the dose of the liquid is slightly higher at 720mg (25mls) every day. This is because the liquid form is not absorbed from the stomach as well as the tablet form.

When should I take efavirenz?

Most people find it is best to take efavirenz just before they go to bed. This helps reduce the impact of some of the side effects, especially during the first few weeks. The dose should be taken at the same time every day.

What are the common side effects with efavirenz?

Efavirenz, like all other medicines, has the potential to cause some side effects. Most of these are minor and will settle within a few days or weeks. Make sure you read the leaflet that came with efavirenz for a complete list.

- 'Head' side effects: Dizziness/light headedness, headache, insomnia, vivid (real feeling) dreams. If you feel dizzy or drowsy you must not drive or operate machinery. Efavirenz can sometimes cause changes in your mood, including feeling worried, depressed or angry. Speak to your doctor about this.
- 'Stomach' side effects: Feeling sick (nausea), vomiting, diarrhoea.
- Changes in blood tests: Changes in some of your liver or kidney tests, or changes in cholesterol.
- Other side effects including rash, weakness, tiredness.

If you experience any side effects, and either they are troubling you or you develop any new symptoms after you start efavirenz, tell your doctor, nurse or pharmacist who will tell you what to do.

If you decide to take stop taking efavirenz, it is important that you tell your doctor before you stop so that they can discuss other treatment options with you. Efavirenz can last for a long time in your bloodstream, longer than other medicines. As a result, it is important to discuss stopping efavirenz with the doctor to minimise the risk of resistance occurring. If resistance occurs, it may mean you are unable to use efavirenz or a similar drug in the future.

If you have a question about efavirenz or any of your medicines, speak to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

Contact: kobler.pharmacy@chelwest.nhs.uk

Telephone: 020 3315 5604

What medicines should I avoid with efavirenz?

It is always important to make your doctor and pharmacist aware of any medicines you take, including herbal, complementary or over the counter medicines to ensure that they are compatible with efavirenz and your other antiretrovirals. Make sure you read the patient information leaflet you received with efavirenz for a full list, but always tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking any of the following before you take either efavirenz or the new medicine:

Medicine	Why do your doctor & pharmacist need to know about this?
Cholesterol medicines called statins	Efavirenz can reduce the amount of statins in your blood. Your clinic doctor will help choose the right statin for you.
Inhalers or nasal sprays	Some inhalers and nasal sprays contain steroids which can build up in your body if taken with certain antiretrovirals, leading to side effects.
St John's wort for depression	This can reduce the levels of efavirenz within your body, meaning it may be less effective at suppressing the virus.
Calcium or iron supplements, multivitamins, or other indigestion remedies	Medicines or supplements containing calcium, iron, magnesium, or aluminium can stop you from absorbing some antiretrovirals properly. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any of these.
Contraceptives (birth control)	Efavirenz can reduce the amount of contraceptive in your body, making it less effective. Your clinic will help choose the right method of contraception for you.

What if I:

Get a headache or just need a pain killer?

Paracetamol can be taken with efavirenz. Ibuprofen can also be taken, as long as you don't have any problems such as stomach ulcers or asthma, or unless your doctor has advised you to avoid NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) for any reason.

Get hayfever or have other allergies?

The antihistamines cetirizine and chlorphenamine can be taken with efavirenz. If your allergy is related to efavirenz (such as a rash) or any other medicines, speak to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any medicines. You should speak to your doctor or pharmacist before using any nasal sprays or getting any injections to check for possible interactions with efavirenz and any other medicines you are taking.

Get diarrhoea?

For short-term diarrhoea relief, you can use loperamide. Remember to drink plenty of fluids. If you get a lot of diarrhoea and it lasts more than a few days, contact your clinic to ask for advice.

Get heartburn, reflux, indigestion or need medicines for stomach ulcers?

Antacids and proton pump inhibitors (used to treat stomach ulcers) can be taken with efavirenz but may affect other antiretrovirals such as atazanavir, raltegravir, dolutegravir or elvitegravir, so check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking them.

Am prescribed or take something for my mood, such as an antidepressant or St John's wort?

Check with your clinic doctor or pharmacist before taking these. St John's wort can reduce the levels of some antiretrovirals within your body, meaning they may be less effective at suppressing the virus.

Currently take, or would like to take supplements, including calcium or iron?

Most supplements can be taken with efavirenz, but always check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking them. However, if you also take the antiretrovirals atazanavir, raltegravir, dolutegravir or elvitegravir, check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking the supplement.

Miss my efavirenz!

Antiretrovirals work best if there is a constant amount of the drugs in your body. It is really important that you take them regularly. However, occasionally you may forget a dose. Don't worry if this happens, just follow the guidance below. If you are having problems remembering to take your medicines, speak with your clinic now and they may be able to help you.

- If you notice **within 12 hours** of the time you usually take efavirenz, you must take the tablet as soon as possible. Then take the next dose as usual.
- If you notice **12 hours or more after** the time you usually take efavirenz, then do not take the missed dose. Wait and take the next dose at your usual time.
- **Never** take a double dose to make up for missing one.