

ACYCLOVIR

Other names: Zovirax®

WHY is this drug prescribed ?

Acyclovir is an antiviral agent used to treat infections such as herpes simplex (HSV-1 and HSV-2) infections, herpes zoster (shingles) and varicella (chickenpox). Herpes simplex causes small, fluid-filled blisters which break down into ulcers/sores which may be itchy or painful. These blisters contain many infectious herpes simplex virus particles. Acyclovir helps stop the virus from spreading, reduces the number of painful blisters and also helps them to heal more quickly. If you start taking acyclovir as soon as you feel an episode starting, it may be possible to actually prevent the blisters from developing. It may also be used in the prevention of recurrences of genital herpes.

HOW should this drug be taken ?

Acyclovir is available as 200 mg, 400 mg, and 800 mg tablets, as well as a banana-flavoured liquid. The recommended dose of acyclovir will depend on the reason your doctor has prescribed this drug.

The recommended dose used to treat a first episode of genital herpes is 200 mg five times daily or 400 mg three times daily for 10 days. Therapy should be started as early as possible following onset of signs and symptoms.

The recommended dose to prevent recurrent infections is 200 mg three times

daily or 400 mg two times daily. This may be increased if necessary, in order to prevent the virus from multiplying.

The dose may need to be adjusted if you have kidney problems.

Your dosage is:

200 mg tablet
400 mg tablet
800 mg tablet

____ tablet (____mg) ____ times a day

or

40 mg / mL oral solution

____ mL (____mg) ____ times a day

You may take acyclovir with or without food. Swallow each caplet whole with water. Do not chew it. It is important to finish all the tablets you have been given even if you start to feel better.

To help with the management of genital herpes, there is also a cream and ointment available. It is applied to the affected area 4-6 times daily for up to 10 days. It should be applied adequately to cover all lesions. A finger cot or rubber glove should be used when applying it in order to prevent spreading the virus to other body sites or infecting someone else. It should not be used in the eyes or other mucous membranes (inside mouth, nose).

What should you do if you FORGET a dose ?

If you miss a dose of acyclovir take it as soon as possible, then just carry on with your regular dosing schedule. If you remember your missed dose close to the time for your next dose (ie. within 2 hours), do not double your dose. Continue with your regular dosing schedule.

What ADVERSE EFFECTS can this drug cause? What should you do about them?

Acyclovir is generally well tolerated. **Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, dizziness, or headache** may occur. If these effects occur and are bothersome, let your doctor or pharmacist know. Call your doctor immediately if you experience adverse effects such as **unusual bruising or bleeding** or if you think you have an **allergic reaction (ie. rash)** to acyclovir.

It is important that you keep your doctor appointments and come for your laboratory tests so that your progress can be followed.

What other precautions should you follow while using this drug ?

Herpes infections cause painful blisters on the skin. The fluid in these blisters contains the virus which causes the disease. The infections can be easily spread to you or other people. If you touch your skin sores, wash your hands immediately afterwards. Avoid intimate contact with others when the disease is visible.

Let your doctor know if you have had an allergic reaction or adverse effect to other antiviral agents such as valacyclovir (Valtrex®), famciclovir (Famvir®), ganciclovir (Cytovene®), or valganciclovir (Valcyte™).

Certain drugs can increase or decrease the effect of acyclovir. Also, acyclovir might influence the effect of other drugs you are taking. Inform your doctor and pharmacist of all prescribed and non-prescribed drugs you are taking. As well, you should inform them of natural products you are taking. If you wish to start a new drug or natural product, please consult with your pharmacist before doing so.

It is especially important to let them know if you are taking probenecid (Benemid®), cimetidine (Tagamet®), steroids (eg. Prednisone) or any anti-cancer drugs before starting acyclovir.

Since acyclovir is removed from the body by your kidneys, it is important to inform your doctor if you have kidney problems prior to taking this drug. Also tell your doctor if you have HIV, AIDS, or any kind of bone marrow disease.

The safety of acyclovir has not been established during pregnancy or breastfeeding. Please discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist if this is a concern.

How should this drug be STORED?

Acyclovir should be stored in a cool (15-25°C) dry place, protected from light and well out of the reach of children. Do not

store in the bathroom or kitchen, as heat and moisture may cause the drug to be less active.

Ensure that the drug has not expired by checking the expiry date (“EXP”) shown on the outside of the package.

If you have any questions or concerns about this drug or if you are experiencing adverse effects, please discuss them with your pharmacist, doctor or nurse.

Write questions or concerns down to ensure they are addressed.

The following pharmacist is available to answer questions:

Pharmacist: _____
Telephone: _____

Reference: Product monograph Zovirax® (Acyclovir). Mississauga, ON, Canada: GlaxoSmithKline, 2008. Prepared by the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional Specialty Group, 2003. Reviewed 2009.

Additional medication fact sheets and updates may be found at: www.hivclinic.ca

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MEDICATION

FACT SHEET