



Pharmacy

Pharmacy Department

ZIDOVUDINE/LAMIVUDINE (COMBIVIR)

Other NAMES: Combination of zidovudine 300 mg + lamivudine 150 mg in each tablet

WHY is this drug prescribed?

Combivir is a combination of two antiretroviral (anti-HIV) drugs, zidovudine and lamivudine, into one tablet. Combivir is used together with one or more antiretrovirals to delay the progression of HIV infection. It has also been effective in preventing HIV after an occupational exposure such as a needle stick injury.

Zidovudine and lamivudine typically do not cure AIDS or completely kill the HIV virus, but help to prevent further damage by slowing down the production of new viruses. Treatment with Combivir may not completely reduce the risk of passing infection on to others. You should always use appropriate precautions to prevent passing HIV on to others.

HOW should this drug be taken?

Generally, the dose is 1 tablet twice daily. Combivir can be taken with or without food.

What should you do if you FORGET a dose?

If you miss a dose of Combivir, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is time for your next dose, do not double the dose; just carry on with your regular schedule.

Why should you not forget to take this drug?

If you miss doses of Combivir, the amount of HIV virus in your blood (known as the viral load) can start increasing and your immune system may be damaged. A few missed doses can be enough for the two components of Combivir to stop being active, a phenomenon known as resistance. When this happens, other antiretrovirals that work in a similar way as zidovudine and lamivudine may also become inactive. Therefore, **missing doses of Combivir can decrease** treatment options for the future. Even if you do not feel well, you should always take your doses of Combivir. Please do not stop Combivir without talking to your doctor first.

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

Most adverse effects are mild and often temporary, and may include **headache, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, decreased appetite, fatigue, general feeling of being unwell**. Your doctor and pharmacist can suggest ways to manage these symptoms. Nausea is such a common side effect it is often recommended to take an antinausea medication like Gravol routinely.

Rarely, Combivir may cause **anemia** (reduced number of red blood cells that can make you feel tired or short of breath), leucopenia (a decrease in the number of white blood cells so that you have a higher risk of bacterial infection), or **thrombocytopenia** (a decrease in the number of platelets that can increase your risk of bleeding or bruising). Also, muscle pain can occur after you have been on the drug for many months. Inform your doctor if you notice any symptoms of **fever, chills, shortness of breath, racing heart beat, fatigue, bleeding, bruising or muscle pain**.

As with most drugs, some people experience allergic reactions. If you have any of the following symptoms soon after taking Combivir, STOP taking the drug and tell your doctor immediately: sudden shortness of breath, chest pain, swelling of eyelids, face or lips, and skin rash anywhere on the body.

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?

You must make sure that you are taking the right dose. If you take higher doses of Combivir than what is prescribed, you may increase the chance of having adverse effects. If you take lower doses of Combivir than what is prescribed, the HIV virus may become resistant to zidovudine and lamivudine.

Certain drugs can increase or decrease the effect of Combivir. Also, Combivir 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.

Please inform your doctor if you are pregnant.

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How should this drug be STORED?

Combivir should be stored in a cool (15-30 C) dry place, protected from light and well out of the reach of children. Ensure that the drug is not expired by checking the expiry date (“EXP”) shown on the outside of the package.

Do not store in your bathroom or kitchen, as heat and moisture may cause the medication to be less active.

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.

Adapted from: the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional Specialty Group, 2003