

Acyclovir (Zovirax)

What is acyclovir and how does it work?

Acyclovir (a SYE klo veer) is a medicine used to prevent or treat viral infections. It is also used to help slow down the growth and spread of the herpes virus in the body. Although acyclovir does not cure herpes it can help to control its symptoms. Other herpes infections can also be helped including genital herpes, cold sores, shingles, and chicken pox.

Acyclovir may also be used for other health conditions.

What should I tell my doctor before I start this treatment?

Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, become pregnant, or are breastfeeding while taking this medicine.

Tell your doctor if you have ever had an allergic reaction to this medicine and what signs you had of an allergic reaction. Tell your doctor about any allergies you may have to medicines, foods or other substances.

It is important to tell your doctor if you have had:

- Kidney disease
- A weak immune system caused by a health condition or certain medicines that you are taking

How will my treatment be given?

It is important to always read the directions on your prescription label including all medicine handouts provided to you. Only use the medicine as noted on these directions and in the way it was ordered by your doctor. Do not skip doses. Call your health care provider to find out what to do if you miss a dose.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

Use this medicine for the full prescribed length of time, even if your symptoms improve. Skipping doses may increase the risk of your virus becoming resistant to medicine in the future.

Start taking acyclovir as soon as you can after the first symptoms are noted (such as tingling, burning, blisters).

Acyclovir doses (amounts) are ordered by your health care provider based on your weight. Your dose may need to change if you gain or lose much weight.

Acyclovir can be given by mouth in various forms:

- A tablet or capsule (pill) may be taken with or without food. If it causes upset stomach, take with food.
- An **oral suspension** (liquid) form of this medicine may also be used. Carefully measure your ordered dose using the measuring tool from the pharmacy. Do not use a kitchen spoon.

What are the side effects of this treatment?

Common side effects include:

- Upset stomach (nausea) or loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Mild skin pain
- Rash, itching

When should I call my doctor?

You should call your doctor right away if you have any of the following symptoms or problems:

- Any signs of a kidney problem such as:
 - ▶ Little or no urinating (peeing)
 - ▶ Painful or difficulty with urinating (peeing)
 - ▶ Swelling in your feet or ankles
 - ▶ Feeling tired
 - ▶ Feeling short of breath

- Changes in behavior
- Confusion or hallucinations
- Bleeding or unexplained bruising (including purple or red pinpoint spots under your skin)
- Call for emergency help if you have any signs of an allergic reaction, including:
 - ▶ Difficulty breathing (shortness of breath) or wheezing
 - ▶ Swelling in your mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat
 - ▶ Skin reactions such as hives

Is there anything else I should know about this treatment?

- Herpes can be passed to your baby during childbirth if you have a genital lesion when your baby is born. If you have genital herpes, it is very important to prevent these lesions during pregnancy. Take your medicine as directed to best control your infection.
- Lesions (sores) caused by the herpes virus should be kept as clean and dry as possible. Wear loose clothing that does not rub to help prevent irritation of these lesions.
- Herpes infections are contagious. You can infect other people, even during your treatment with acyclovir. Do not let infected areas come into contact with other people. Do not touch an infected area and then touch your eyes. Wash your hands often with soap and water to prevent passing the infection to others.
- Acyclovir will not stop you from passing genital herpes to your sex partner. Avoid sexual intercourse and other sexual activities while you have active lesions (sores) or at the first symptoms of a herpes outbreak. Genital herpes can be contagious, even if you have no symptoms.
- Acyclovir can cause harm to your kidneys, especially if you also use other medicines for infections, cancer, osteoporosis, organ transplant rejection, bowel disorders, high blood pressure, or pain or arthritis (this includes Advil, Motrin, and Aleve).
- Other medicines you take can affect acyclovir. Make sure your doctor knows of all prescription and over the counter medicines you take including vitamins and herbal products. Let your doctor know if you start any new medicine or stop taking current medicine while you are taking acyclovir.

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- Drink 8 to 10, 8-ounce glasses of non-caffeine fluid each day unless told to drink less by your doctor. Drinking these liquids will help to protect your kidneys. Do not drink fluids that include alcohol.
- Keep this and all other medicines out of the reach of children and pets.
- Acyclovir should be stored at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Never share your medicine with others.