

## abacavir

From the NAPWA website at <http://www.napwa.org.au/rx/nrti/abacavir>

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## HIV treatments information

### abacavir



Abacavir is an [NRTIA](#) type of anti-HIV drug that works by inhibiting a stage of the HIV life cycle called reverse transcription. Non-nucleosides work in a similar way, but are chemically different. which is highly potent in people who have not taken antiretroviral therapy and is also often effective in people who have taken HIV treatments before.

A main concern with any regimen containing abacavir is the possibility of developing a severe hypersensitivity reaction to the drug. It is also not recommended for people already at risk of [heart attack](#) A life-threatening emergency in which the blood supply to the heart is suddenly cut off, causing the heart muscle (myocardium) to die from lack of oxygen..

However, abacavir is one of the [antiretrovirals](#) A medication or other substance which is active against retroviruses such as HIV. that can cross the [blood-brain barrier](#) A selective barrier (obstacle) between circulating blood and brain tissues that prevents damaging substances from reaching the brain. Certain compounds readily cross the blood-brain barrier; others are completely blocked. and combat HIV in the central nervous system and reduce [viral load](#) A measurement of the quantity of HIV RNA in the blood. Viral load blood test results are expressed as the number of copies (of HIV) per milliliter of blood plasma. in the cerebrospinal fluid.

### About this treatment

Generic name:	abacavir
Pronunciation:	<i>uh-BACK-aveer</i>
Brand name:	Ziagen
Also known as:	1592U89
Drug class:	nucleoside analogue
Availability in Australia:	

- **Available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)** through [S100 prescribers](#).
- This drug may be available through clinical trials in Australia.
- You may be able to import this drug from overseas for your personal use.

Presentation:

300mg tablet;20mg per mL, 240mL oral solution

What the [treatment guidelines](#) say:

The Guidelines note that abacavir can cause a potentially fatal hypersensitivity reaction. Symptoms of hypersensitivity may include fever, rash, nausea, vomiting, malaise or fatigue, loss of appetite, and/or respiratory symptoms such as sore throat, cough,

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shortness of breath. Abacavir may also cause a rare but potentially life-threatening toxicity called lactic acidosis with hepatic steatosis.

Links:

- <http://www.aidsmap.com/cms1315518.asp>
- <http://www.thebody.com/content/art1337.html>
- <http://www.pbs.gov.au/html/consumer/search/results?term=Ziagen&scope=PBS+STATIC&form-type=simple>

## Taking it

Like all anti-HIV drugs, abacavir must be taken in combination with other drugs to be completely effective. Commonly, abacavir is combined with one other nucleoside (NRTI) drug and either a protease inhibitor or non-nucleoside, although other combinations are sometimes used. Your doctor will advise you on the right combination of drugs to suit your circumstances.

## Dosage

The normal adult dose is one 300mg tablet twice a day or two 300mg tablets once a day.

For children and adolescents age 3 months to 16 years, the recommended dosage is 8 mg/kg twice a day (up to a maximum of 300 mg twice a day).

Regardless of what you read on this website or elsewhere, you should always take your medications according to your doctor's instructions. If you're unsure, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

## With or without food?

Abacavir may be taken with or without food.

## Side effects

All drugs can produce side effects in some people. These may be mild, moderate or severe, so you should be aware of potential side effects before starting any drug, and speak to your doctor if you experience side effects that concern you.

- **Common side effects** may include nausea (upset stomach, feeling sick to the stomach), diarrhoea, vomiting, headache, fatigue, lethargy, fever, loss of appetite.
- **Rare side effects** may include serious hypersensitivity reaction which may be life-threatening, lactic acidosis with hepatic steatosis.

It's unlikely you will experience all of these side effects, and you may not experience any side effects at all. Before starting any new drug, ask your doctor about side effects you might experience and discuss strategies for dealing with side effects if they do occur. If you experience any significant side effect you should continue taking your medicine and see your doctor as soon as possible.

## Interactions with other drugs

Patients taking abacavir and methadone hydrochloride should be monitored for methadone withdrawal symptoms as the drug increases clearance of methadone from the body. Alcohol increases the blood levels of abacavir. This is more likely to be a problem for people with liver disease and it is not recommended that they take abacavir.

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