

# Acyclovir

## Names

The generic drug name is acyclovir (ay-SYE-kloe-veer). The brand name is Zovirax®. There may be other names for this medication.

## What is it Used for and How is it Given?

Acyclovir belongs to the family of medicines called antivirals. Antivirals treat infections caused by viruses. Usually, each medication works against only one kind of virus. Acyclovir treats herpes infections such as varicella (chickenpox); varicella-zoster (shingles); herpes simplex encephalitis; and herpes infections of the skin, nose, and mouth in people with weak immune systems. Acyclovir is available as a tablet, capsule, or liquid to take by mouth; as a cream that is applied to the skin; or as an intravenous infusion (given through a thin tube placed in a vein, usually in your arm, wrist, hand or chest). It also comes as a delayed-release buccal tablet to apply to the upper gum of the mouth. Take or use acyclovir exactly as directed. Do not take or use more or less of it or take it more often or for a longer time than prescribed by your doctor.

## What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin?

Tell your doctor if you:

- are allergic to acyclovir, valacyclovir (Valtrex®), or to any other medications or substances, such as foods or dyes
- have kidney, liver, or nervous system disease; or if you ever had problems with your immune system
- may be dehydrated from recent illness or activity
- are pregnant or breastfeeding

**This drug may interact with other medications or cause harmful side effects. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal, or diet supplements that you are taking.**

## What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Upset stomach, nausea, vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness, fatigue, headache, and/or agitation
- Hair loss
- Joint pain
- Vision changes

## How Can I Manage These Side Effects?

- Ask your doctor about medication to help prevent or lessen nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.
- If you develop a rash or other skin problems, do not put anything on it unless it is approved by your doctor.
- Use sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher when you are outdoors, even for a short time, and cover up. Wear wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirts, and pants. Keep your neck, chest, and back covered.

## When Should I Call the Doctor?

**Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if you have signs of a severe allergic reaction** (swelling, tingling in your face, mouth, tongue or throat; chest tightness; trouble breathing; dizziness; heart palpitations; hives

**Call your doctor as soon as immediately if you have:**

- any sign of infection: **Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher**, chills, cough, sore throat, pain or burning upon urination; redness or tenderness along a vein, at an IV site, or at any other wound or skin irritation
- confusion

**Call your doctor as soon as possible if you have:**

- unusual bruising or bleeding, blood in your urine
- uncontrolled nausea or mouth sores that makes it difficult to eat or drink
- persistent loss of appetite or weight loss

## What Else Should I Know About Acyclovir?

- Acyclovir is best taken with a full glass (8 ounces) of water. Drink plenty of fluids while taking this medication. Take capsules, tablets, and oral suspension may be taken with meals or on an empty stomach.
- If you are using oral suspension, use a specially marked measuring spoon. The average household teaspoon may not hold the right amount of liquid.
- Do not miss any doses but do not use this medicine more often or for a longer time than your doctor ordered.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose.
- Store this medicine out of the reach of children and away from heat and direct light. Do not store the capsule or tablet form of this medicine in the bathroom or in other damp places. Do not keep outdated medicine.
- The areas affected by herpes, chickenpox, or shingles should be kept as clean and dry as possible. Also, wear loose-fitting clothing to avoid irritating the sores (blisters).
- If you would like more information about acyclovir, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

