

Epzicom (abacavir+lamivudine)

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What is Epzicom?

- Epzicom is an anti-HIV medication. It is in a category of HIV medicines called nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs). Epzicom prevents HIV from altering the genetic material of healthy T-cells. This prevents the cells from producing new virus and decreases the amount of virus in the body.
- Epzicom is marketed by GlaxoSmithKline. It was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use by people living with HIV in August 2004.
- Epzicom is a combination of two drugs: 600mg of Ziagen® (abacavir) and 300mg of Epivir® (3TC). Epzicom should be prescribed by a healthcare provider for patients who need both of these drugs. Both of these drugs can still be purchased individually for use in combination with other anti-HIV drugs.
- The brand name “Epzicom” is an acronym for EPivir and ZIagen in COMbination.
- Epzicom must be combined with at least one other anti-HIV drug, usually a protease inhibitor (PI) or a non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NNRTI).

What is known about Epzicom?

- Epzicom is a tablet taken once a day. It can be taken with or without food.
- Epzicom should not be any more or less effective than Ziagen and Epivir taken as separate pills together. However, it is considered to be a much more convenient way of taking these two anti-HIV drugs.

- See the “What is known about ...” sections of Ziagen and Epivir for information about possible drug resistance.

What about drug interactions?

- It is believed that Epzicom can be safely taken at the same time as most drugs used to treat HIV and AIDS-related complications.
- Epzicom should not be taken at the same time as Emtriva® or Truvada™ (containing Viread and Emtriva). This is because the Epivir in Epzicom is very similar to Emtriva, and it is not believed that combining these two anti-HIV drugs will make a regimen any more effective against the virus.
- See the “What about drug interactions?” sections of Ziagen and Epivir to learn about possible drug interactions.

What about side effects?

- An important side effect that doctors and patients need to be aware of is “hypersensitivity.” Approximately 8% of people who take Ziagen® (abacavir), one of the two medications in Epzicom, are allergic to it. This can be serious and generally requires that Epzicom be stopped, and that Epzicom or Ziagen should not be taken again. A hypersensitivity reaction usually appears during the second week of therapy, but it can take as long as six weeks to notice any symptoms. The most common symptoms are fever and rash, followed by headaches, stomach upset, feeling sick or tired, sore throat, cough, and shortness of breath. These symptoms usually get worse over time

and it is important that you report them to your doctor immediately. If you need to stop Epzicom because of this hypersensitivity reaction, you will still be able to take Epivir, the other drug in Epzicom.

- Lactic acidosis, which can be fatal, and severe liver problems have been reported in people taking nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs), including Ziagen and Epivir, the two active drugs in Epzicom. Contact your doctor immediately if you experience nausea, vomiting, or unusual or unexpected stomach discomfort; weakness and tiredness; shortness of breath; weakness in the arms and legs; yellowing of the skin or eyes; or pain in the upper stomach area.
- Anti-HIV drug regimens containing nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs), including Epzicom, can cause increased fat levels (cholesterol and triglycerides) in the blood, abnormal body-shape changes (lipodystrophy; including increased fat around the abdomen, breasts, and back of the neck, as well as decreased fat in the face, arms, and legs), and diabetes.
- If you have hepatitis B and HIV and plan to stop taking Epzicom, your doctor might want to frequently check your liver enzymes after stopping treatment. This is because the Epivir in Epzicom is also active against the hepatitis B virus (HBV). If Epivir is stopped abruptly, it can cause liver disease to “flare” and damage the liver.
- See the “What about side effects?” sections of Ziagen and Epivir for additional possible side effects.

Who should not take Epzicom?

- Before taking this medication, tell your doctor if you have: kidney disease; liver disease; a history of pancreatitis; decreased activity of your bone marrow (low red blood cells [anemia] or low white blood cells). You may not be able to take Epzicom, or you may require a lower dose or special monitoring during treatment if you have any of these conditions.
- Epzicom is classified by the FDA as a pregnancy category C drug. All the FDA-approved anti-HIV drugs are classified as either category B or C. Pregnancy category B means that animal studies have failed to demonstrate a risk to the fetus, but there

are no adequate and well-controlled studies in pregnant women. Pregnancy category C means that animal studies have shown an adverse effect on the fetus and there are no adequate and well-controlled studies in humans, but potential benefits may warrant use of the drug in pregnant women despite potential risks. HIV-positive women who become pregnant should discuss the benefits and possible side effects of anti-HIV treatment to help protect their babies from HIV.

- It is not known whether Epzicom passes into breast milk and what effect it may have on a nursing baby. To prevent transmission of the virus to uninfected babies, it is recommended that HIV-positive mothers not breast-feed.

Where can I learn more about clinical trials involving Epzicom?

- If you would like to find out if you are eligible for any clinical trials that include Epzicom, there is an interactive web site run by amfAR, the American Foundation for AIDS Research.
- Another useful service for finding clinical trials is AIDSinfo.nih.gov, a site run by the US National Institutes of Health. They have “health information specialists” you can talk to at their toll-free number at 1-800-HIV-0440 (1-800-448-0440).

a note about this publication

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