

Trizivir (AZT+3TC+abacavir)

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What is Trizivir?

- Trizivir is an anti-HIV medication. It is in a category of HIV medicines called nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs). Trizivir prevents HIV from entering the nucleus of healthy T-cells. This prevents the cells from producing new virus and decreases the amount of virus in the body.
- Trizivir is marketed by GlaxoSmithKline. It was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use by people living with HIV in 2000.
- Trizivir is a combination of three previously approved drugs: 300mg of Retrovir® (AZT), 150mg of Epivir® (3TC), and 300mg of Ziagen® (abacavir). Trizivir should be prescribed by a healthcare provider for patients who need to take all three drugs. For patients only taking AZT and 3TC, a combination tablet called Combivir® is available. Also, any of these three drugs can be purchased individually for use in combination with other anti-HIV drugs.

What is known about Trizivir?

- Trizivir is taken twice daily, one tablet in the morning and one tablet in the evening, with or without food.
- Trizivir should not be any more or less effective than Retrovir, Epivir, and Ziagen taken as separate pills together. However, it is considered to be a much more convenient way of taking these three anti-HIV drugs.
- Many experts now believe that it is best to use Trizivir in combination with a non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NNRTI) or a protease inhibitor (PI). It is not generally recommended that Trizivir be used without an NNRTI or PI, given that it might not be potent enough to keep viral load undetectable for a prolonged period of time.
- The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) only recommends triple-NRTI regimens (e.g., Trizivir) for people who cannot take either a protease inhibitor or an NNRTI, because Trizivir has been shown in clinical trials to be less effective than regimens containing either a protease inhibitor or NNRTI (plus two NRTIs).
- See the “What is known about ...” sections of Retrovir, Epivir, and Ziagen for information about possible drug resistance.

What about drug interactions?

- Trizivir should not be taken at the same time as Emtriva® or Truvada™ (containing Viread and Emtriva). This is because the Efavirenz in Trizivir and Emtriva are very similar 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 Retrovir, Efavirenz, and Ziagen.

What about side effects?

- A rare but potentially serious side effect of Retrovir® (AZT), one of the three drugs in Trizivir, is myopathy (damage to the muscles, including the heart). People who use Retrovir for a long period of time, meaning several years, are at the greatest risk for myopathy. General symptoms of myopathy include weakness of limbs, usually proximal (located close to the center of the body).
- Bone marrow problems, such as decreased production of red blood cells and/or white blood cells, can occur in people taking Retrovir, one of the three active drugs in Trizivir. Contact your doctor immediately if you develop unusual fatigue, pale skin, sore throat, fever, or chills, which may be signs of bone marrow problems.
- An important side effect that doctors and patients need to be aware of is “hypersensitivity.” Approximately 3% to 5% of people who take Ziagen® (abacavir), one of the three medications in Trizivir, are allergic to it. This can be serious and generally requires that Trizivir be stopped, and that Trizivir 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 Trizivir because of this hypersensitivity reaction, you will still be able to take Retrovir and Efavirenz, the two other drugs in Trizivir.

- Lactic acidosis, which can be fatal, and severe liver problems have been reported in people taking nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs), including Retrovir, Efavirenz, and Ziagen, the three active drugs in Trizivir. 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 NRTIs, including Trizivir, 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 Trizivir, your doctor might want to frequently check your liver enzymes after stopping treatment. This is because the Efavirenz in Trizivir is also active against the hepatitis B virus (HBV). If Efavirenz is stopped abruptly, it can cause liver disease to “flare” and damage the liver.
- See the “What about side effects?” sections of Retrovir, Efavirenz, and Ziagen for additional possible side effects.

Who should not take Trizivir?

- 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 Trizivir, or you

may require a lower dose or special monitoring during treatment if you have any of these conditions.

- Do not take Trizivir or Ziagen® (abacavir), one of the three medications in Trizivir, if you have ever had an allergic reaction to Trizivir in the past.
- Trizivir 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 (see our lesson called Pregnancy & HIV).

- It is not known whether Trizivir 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 of Trizivir?

- If you would like to find out if you are eligible for any clinical trials that include Trizivir, 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 U.S. 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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