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**An HIV Information Site & HIV Educational Resource Site (HIS & HERS)**

## Combivir

### General Information

Combivir is actually a combination of two antiviral drugs - zidovudine and lamivudine. It is usually used as one component of a multiple drug combination.

### Specifics

Combivir is a well-recognized and important drug for the treatment of HIV infection. Combivir works by inhibiting the formation of HIV's genetic material. Both of Combivir's components are called nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs) or "nukes."

### Dosing

Generally Combivir is taken at 1 pill twice a day without food or with a low-fat food. Fat in food may decrease the levels of the zidovudine part of Combivir and compromise its potency.

### Adherence

(this refers to your willingness, ability, and actual performance in taking your medications)

**As with any antiviral drug or antibiotic, try not to ever miss a dose.** If you miss a dose and notice that you have done so within a few hours of its scheduled time, you may take the dose as usual and take the next dose at its regular time.

Do not change the dosing of Combivir unless this is discussed beforehand with your healthcare provider.

**If you miss more than one dose, look at the reasons why you missed them and come up with a plan to avoid it in the future.** For example, if you fell asleep too early, take the medicine earlier in the evening, with your later meal, set an alarm, or have someone appointed to wake you up for your medicine.

It is strongly recommended that you consider using weekly pill boxes and arrange all of your doses a week in advance. Buy a small pill box so that you can carry a dose or two of your medicines with you in case you are away from home.

If you have to stop or you run out of Combivir, you should stop your other antiviral medications while you are in the process of getting refills of Combivir. Resume all of your antivirals together again when you are able or when instructed by your healthcare provider. This is referred to by the author of this information as the "all or none" rule (see the [Adherence page](#) of this site.)

## Possible Side Effects

The package insert for most drugs including Combivir is often overwhelming and scary with perhaps an overemphasis on side effects. We have summarized the important and more common problems here.

### Most people take Combivir without many side effects.

Possible side effects include nausea (which usually gets better over time,) headache, muscle aches, liver problems, anemia (low red blood cells) or low white blood cells. Usually you will have blood tests done in the first month to look for the beneficial effects of zidovudine and any side effects. Symptoms of anemia are weakness, fatigue, appearing pale, fast heart beat, and shortness of breath. Symptoms of low white blood cells include fever and infections.

Many minor side effects will either stay constant or get better with time. It is mainly the side effects that are severe or get worse that may cause significant health risks for you.

Occasionally you may be prescribed an injectable hormone and iron pills to increase red blood cell production if you get anemic due to the zidovudine (AZT) in Combivir.

All drugs of this type can cause or contribute to abnormal fat redistribution characterized by thinning of the face, arms, or legs. In most cases this would be also accompanied by elevated cholesterol levels, elevated triglyceride levels, and perhaps a tendency to develop diabetes.

Rarely, a build-up of (lactic) acid may occur due to taking medications of this type. Persons taking multiple nukes (NRTIs), those taking d4T (stavudine, Zerit), those on the combination of d4T (stavudine, Zerit) and ddl (didanosine, Videx), and those persons with hepatitis C are the most likely to encounter this rare, but potentially fatal problem. Pregnancy may also raise the risk of this problem. The symptoms are vague but troublesome including nausea, vomiting, muscle aches, weakness, turning yellow with jaundice, and just feeling plain bad.

**Report to you healthcare provider or go to an Emergency Room** if you have severe side effects, increasing side effects, shortness of breath, uncontrollable diarrhea, fever, weakness, jaundice (eyes and skin turn yellow,) muscle pain, nausea and vomiting so that you cannot hold down your food and liquids.

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