

HIVInfo.us presents

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

sulfamethoxazole / trimethoprim - Bactrim, Septra, or generic

General Information

Sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim is a combination of two antibiotics in one pill or capsule used for many purposes.

Specifics

Sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim is a well-respected and well-tolerated combination of two antibiotics. It has a long track record of effectiveness and safety.

Sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim works by inhibiting the production of bacterial proteins. Sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim is used for a variety of purposes including but not limited to the following:

1. Treat pneumonia including pneumocystis pneumonia (PCP,) urinary tract infections, bone infections, brain infections, skin infections, and many other serious infections
2. Prevent pneumocystis pneumonia (this is probably one of the most common uses in the setting of HIV infection)

Dosing

Sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim may be given intravenously or by pill or liquid at a variety of doses to treat infections: the usual range is 1-2 double strength tablets 2-3 times per day depending on the infection, your weight, and your kidney function.

The usual dose to prevent pneumocystis pneumonia is one double strength tablet daily, every other day, or 3-4 days per week.

Sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim is used to prevent PCP in persons who have T-cell counts less than 200 or other AIDS -defining conditions. Sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim is usually continued until the immune system has improved dramatically with T-cell counts greater than 250 or so assuming the HIV viral load is suppressed.

Adherence

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

For further information and tips on adherence, go to the **Adherence section** of this site.

It is very important to take every dose that is prescribed unless instructed by your healthcare provider.

If you miss doses, the infection that is being treated may not get better or sometimes the infection can even get much worse by the germ developing resistance to sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim.

If you miss doses when sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim is used to prevent PCP, you may get PCP which is a serious, potentially life-threatening pneumonia.

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.

Possible Side Effects

The package insert for most drugs including sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim 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 sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim without any or very many side effects.

Possible side effects include diarrhea, nausea, kidney problems, liver problems, low white blood cells, low platelet cells, or allergic rashes. You may be more susceptible to low white blood cells or low platelet cells if you have more advanced HIV or if you are taking other drugs that cause these side effects (zidovudine, chemotherapy, etc.) or if you have underlying conditions that cause these problems (e.g., cirrhosis). You may be more susceptible to kidney problems if you already have some kidney problems or you are taking other drugs which can lower kidney function (aspirin, ibuprofen, furosemide, certain blood pressure medications, Alleve, Motrin, Vioxx, etc.)

Allergic rashes can be very minor to very serious (rarely,) but all rashes should be reported. If you have rash that steadily gets worse or you have a rash and fever, you need to inform your healthcare provider immediately.

Sometimes if you are allergic to sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim but you really need it for treatment or prevention, you may undergo a procedure called "desensitization" which may help.

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) or rash.