



## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Didanosine

This information from Lexicomp® explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

## Warning

- Rarely, this drug may cause a swollen liver and a buildup of acid in the blood. Sometimes, this may be deadly. The risk may be higher in females, in overweight people, and in people who have taken drugs like this one for a long time.
- Do not take this drug with stavudine. Deadly acid health problems have happened during pregnancy in people taking this drug and stavudine with certain other HIV drugs. If you have questions, talk with your doctor.
- This drug may cause very bad and sometimes deadly pancreas problems (pancreatitis). This may happen soon after use as well as many years after use. Signs of pancreatitis include stomach pain, upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite. Call your doctor right away if you have any of these signs.

## What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat HIV infection.

## **What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?**

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you are taking any of these drugs: Allopurinol or ribavirin.
- If you are taking hydroxyurea.
- If you are pregnant, may become pregnant, or are breast-feeding. Before taking this drug, you will need to talk about the benefits and risks to you and the baby. You will also need to talk about the best way to prevent passing HIV to the baby.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

## **What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?**

### **All products:**

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Have your blood work checked and eye exams as you have been told by your doctor.
- Loss of body fat in the legs, arms, buttocks, and face can happen with this drug. This may not go back to normal. It is not known how this loss of body fat may affect health over a long time. You will need to be checked for any changes in body fat while you take this drug. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.

- This drug is not a cure for HIV. Keep taking this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well. Be sure to stay under the care of your doctor and have regular appointments.
- This drug helps to lower how much HIV is in the blood. Lowering the amount of HIV in the blood until it is not detected on blood tests can help lower the risk of spreading HIV to others. There are also other ways to help prevent the spread of HIV to others. This includes using condoms during sex and not sharing needles and other injection equipment. Talk with your doctor or other health care provider about the best way to prevent spreading HIV to others.
- Avoid drinking alcohol while taking this drug.
- Liver problems have happened with this drug. Sometimes these problems have been severe, leading to liver transplant or death. Liver problems may happen in people with or without liver disease. Talk with the doctor.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.

### **Liquid (solution):**

- This drug may prevent other drugs taken by mouth from getting into the body. If you take other drugs by mouth, you may need to take them at some other time than this drug. Talk with your doctor.

### **What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?**

**WARNING/CAUTION:** Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual

hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.

- Signs of too much lactic acid in the blood (lactic acidosis) like fast breathing, fast heartbeat, a heartbeat that does not feel normal, very bad upset stomach or throwing up, feeling very sleepy, shortness of breath, feeling very tired or weak, very bad dizziness, feeling cold, or muscle pain or cramps.
- Signs of liver problems like dark urine, tiredness, decreased appetite, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.
- Swelling of belly.
- Severe dizziness or passing out.
- Numbness, pain, tingling, or cold feeling of the hands or feet.
- Any unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Change in eyesight.
- Changes in your immune system can happen when you start taking drugs to treat HIV. If you have an infection that you did not know you had, it may show up when you take this drug. Tell your doctor right away if you have any new signs after you start this drug, even after taking it for several months. This includes signs of infection like fever, sore throat, weakness, cough, or shortness of breath.

## **What are some other side effects of this drug?**

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Headache.
- Diarrhea, stomach pain, upset stomach, or throwing up.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at <https://www.fda.gov/medwatch>.

## **How is this drug best taken?**

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

### **All products:**

- It is important that you do not miss or skip a dose of this drug during treatment.
- Take on an empty stomach.
- Take at least 30 minutes before or 2 hours after a meal.
- If you also take nelfinavir, take it at least 1 hour after you take this drug.

### **Long-acting capsules:**

- Swallow whole. Do not chew, open, or crush.

### **Liquid (solution):**

- Your pharmacist will need to mix this drug before you get it.
- Shake well before use.
- Measure liquid doses carefully. Use the measuring device that comes with this drug. If there is none, ask the pharmacist for a device to measure this drug.

## **What do I do if I miss a dose?**

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

- If you are not sure what to do if you miss a dose, call your doctor.

## **How do I store and/or throw out this drug?**

### **Long-acting capsules:**

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.

### **Liquid (solution):**

- Store in a refrigerator. Do not freeze.
- Throw away any unused portion after 30 days.

### **All products:**

- Keep lid tightly closed.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

## **General drug facts**

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- This drug comes with an extra patient fact sheet called a Medication Guide. Read it with care. Read it again each time this drug is refilled. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with the doctor, pharmacist, or other health care provider.

- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

## **Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer**

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at

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If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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