



Kivexa

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## What is *Kivexa*?

*Kivexa* is a medication used to treat HIV. It is a combination of two antiretroviral drugs called abacavir and lamivudine. These are combined in one pill, taken once a day along with another antiretroviral drug.

It combines 600mg abacavir and 300mg lamivudine in an orange, capsule-shaped tablet. The tablets have 'GS FC2' on one side.

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## How does *Kivexa* work?

*Kivexa* combines two drugs in one pill. Abacavir and lamivudine are from a class of drugs known as NRTIs (nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors).

Your doctor will prescribe *Kivexa* as part of your HIV treatment, along with an antiretroviral from another class of drugs. It is important to take all the drugs as prescribed, every day.

Each drug class works against HIV in a different way.

The aim of HIV treatment is to reduce the level of HIV in your body (viral load). Ideally, your viral load should become so low that it is undetectable – usually less than 50 copies of virus per ml of blood. Taking HIV treatment and having an undetectable viral load protects your immune system and stops HIV being passed on to someone else during sex.

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## How do I take *Kivexa*?

You should take *Kivexa* once a day, with some water. You can take it with or without food.

HIV treatment works best if you take it every day. If you forget to take a dose of *Kivexa*, take it as soon as you remember. If it's nearly time to take your next dose then don't take a double dose, just skip the dose you've forgotten and carry on.

If you regularly forget to take your treatment, or you aren't taking it for another reason, it's important to talk to your doctor about this.

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## Allergic reaction

Abacavir can cause a serious hypersensitivity (allergic) reaction. This is associated with the presence of a particular gene. Before starting treatment with *Kivexa* (or any other treatment that contains abacavir) you should have a test to see if you have this gene (HLA-B\*5701). If the test is positive you must not take abacavir. If the test is negative, it is highly unlikely that an allergic reaction will occur, but contact your HIV clinic immediately (or A&E if out of hours) if you begin to feel unwell after starting the drug.

In the box with the drug there is an 'alert card', which you should carry with you for the first six weeks of taking abacavir. The particular side-effects you should look out for during this time are:

- a skin rash

or if you get one or more symptoms from at least two of the following groups:

- fever
- shortness of breath, sore throat or cough
- nausea or vomiting, or diarrhoea or abdominal pain
- severe tiredness or achiness or generally feeling ill.

You should never retry abacavir, if you have had an allergic reaction to it previously.

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## What are the side-effects of *Kivexa*?

All drugs have possible side-effects. It's a good idea to talk to your doctor about possible side-effects before you start taking a drug. If you experience something that might be a side-effect, talk to your doctor about what can be done. A full list of side-effects, including less common side-effects, should be included in the leaflet that comes in the packaging with *Kivexa*. See also the section on 'allergic reaction' above.

We generally divide side-effects into two types:

Common – a side-effect that occurs in at least one in a hundred people (more than 1%) who take this drug.

Rare – a side-effect that occurs in fewer than one in a hundred people (less than 1%) who take this drug.

The most common side-effects of *Kivexa* are hypersensitivity reaction, headache, nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pains, loss of appetite, tiredness, lack of energy,



fever, general feeling of being unwell, difficulty sleeping, muscle pain and discomfort, joint pain, cough, irritated or runny nose, skin rash, hair loss.

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## Does *Kivexa* interact with other drugs?

It's important that your doctor and pharmacist know about any other drugs you are taking. That includes medicine prescribed by another doctor, drugs you have bought from a high-street chemist, herbal and alternative treatments, and recreational drugs.

Some medicines should not be taken together because if they are this can cause serious side-effects, or it can stop one or both of the drugs from working. Other drug interactions are less dangerous but still need to be taken seriously. If levels of one drug are affected, you may need to change the dose you take.

A list of drugs, known to have interactions with *Kivexa*, should be included in the leaflet that comes in the packaging with *Kivexa*. Tell your doctor if you are taking any of these drugs, and other drugs that are not on the list.

You should not take *Kivexa* with any of the following drugs:

- emtricitabine
- lamivudine
- high doses of trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole
- cladribine.

There are other interactions, including with phenytoin, a drug used to treat epilepsy and methadone, used as a heroin substitute, so it is very important that you tell your doctor about other drugs you are taking.

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## Can I take *Kivexa* in pregnancy?

There are other things which are important to your health and HIV care, and which you and your doctor may take into account when making decisions about your treatment. For example, if you are considering having a baby, or want to start taking contraception.

*Kivexa* is not recommended for women who want to get pregnant, or who are pregnant. If you are planning to have a baby or think there is the possibility you might get pregnant, talk to your doctor about which drug combination would be best for you.

## Talking to your doctor

If you have any concerns about your treatment or other aspects of your health, it's important to talk to your doctor about them.

For example, if you have a symptom or side-effect or if you are having problems taking your treatment every day, it's important that your doctor knows about this. If you are taking any other medication or recreational drugs, or if you have another medical condition, this is also important for your doctor to know about.

Building a relationship with a doctor may take time. You may feel very comfortable talking to your doctor, but some people find it more difficult, particularly when talking about sex, mental health, or symptoms they find embarrassing. It's also easy to forget things you wanted to talk about.

Preparing for an appointment can be very helpful. Take some time to think about what you are going to say. You might find it helpful to talk to someone else first, or to make some notes and bring them to your appointment. Our online tool *Talking points* may help you to prepare for your next appointment – visit [www.aidsmap.com/talking-points](http://www.aidsmap.com/talking-points)

*For detailed information on this drug, visit the [Kivexa](#) pages in the HIV treatments directory.*

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We recommend that this information should always be used in conjunction with professional medical advice.

This factsheet is produced by an organisation called NAM, and has been reviewed by members of our volunteer panels of people living with HIV and medical professionals. We welcome your feedback on our information resources.

NAM provides up-to-date and impartial HIV information. Please visit us at our website where you can read the latest HIV news and sign up for free email updates.

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Published March 2017.  
Due for review March 2020.