

# efavirenz

(generic equivalent of Sustiva®)

600 mg – yellow, oval tablet  
200 mg – yellow capsule  
50 mg – yellow and white capsule

## What is efavirenz?

Efavirenz is a medicine used to lower the amount of HIV virus in your body and make your immune system stronger. Efavirenz is always used with other HIV medicines.

## How do I take it?

- Take as directed on the prescription label:
- 
- Take it at the same time every day, with or without food
  - Taking it on an empty stomach is recommended to lower the chance of sleep-related side effects. If you prefer to take efavirenz with food, choose low-fat foods
  - Taking it at bedtime may reduce daytime side effects
  - Swallow tablets or capsules whole (do NOT crush or chew)

Store in a dry place at room temperature, and keep out of reach of children

## What if I forget to take it?

It is very important to take efavirenz every day to make sure that it keeps working. If you miss a dose, there is a higher chance that the virus will change to a form that is harder to treat. This is called "resistance".

If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. Be aware that if you usually take efavirenz at bedtime, you might notice some dizziness or difficulty concentrating for a few hours after taking a daytime dose. If it is almost time for

your next dose, do not take 2 doses at the same time.

If you are not sure if you should take your dose, call the pharmacist.

If you stop taking HIV medicine, the amount of HIV virus in your blood will increase.

**Do not stop any of your HIV medicines without talking to your doctor.**

## What should I expect?

Side effects may include:

- vivid dreams
- trouble sleeping
- tiredness
- trouble concentrating
- dizziness
- changes in body fat
- changes in cholesterol

Troubles with sleep and concentration are common when you first start taking efavirenz, but usually get better within 2-4 weeks.

Rare, serious side effects include:

- Allergic reaction: Signs include rash, blisters on skin or mouth, swelling of the face or throat, difficulty breathing, fever, flu-like symptoms
- Mood changes, feeling sad or depressed
- Liver problems: Signs include yellow skin or eyes, dark urine, pale stools, or pain on right side below ribs
- Change in heart beat: Signs include dizziness, fast heart beats, fainting or seizures

**Always tell your doctor or pharmacist if side effects are bothering you. IMMEDIATELY contact your doctor if you have any serious side effects**

It is important to have regular blood tests to watch for side effects and make sure your HIV medicine is working to control the virus.

Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant or are thinking about becoming pregnant, or if you plan to breastfeed.

## **Can I take efavirenz with other medicines?**

Some medicines interact with efavirenz. Drug interactions can stop your treatment from working or may cause unwanted side effects.

Always tell your pharmacist and doctor if you are using any prescription or non-prescription medicines, vitamins, supplements, natural medicines or recreational drugs.

Medicines that may interact with efavirenz include:

- Some medicines to treat seizures such as phenytoin (Dilantin®)
- Some antibiotics such as rifampin
- Some antifungal medicines such as ketoconazole
- Some blood thinners such as rivaroxaban (Xarelto®), warfarin
- Methadone
- Some medicines used for sleeping
- Some medicines to treat depression or anxiety
- Some birth control medicines
- Herbal medicines such as St. John's Wort, ginkgo biloba

This is not a complete list of medicines that interact with efavirenz.

Always check with your pharmacist before starting any new medicines to make sure that they are safe for you.

## **What if I have questions?**

If you have questions or problems with your medicine, call the St. Paul's Hospital Ambulatory Pharmacy:

**1-888-511-6222**

(Monday to Friday daytime and urgent issues after hours)

To book an appointment to see a St. Paul's Hospital pharmacist, call reception:

**604-806-8060**

(Monday to Friday daytime)

This pamphlet is for general information purposes only. It does not provide individual medical or treatment advice and is not a substitute for medical or professional care.