



# Drug Information

## d4T (stavudine, Zerit)

Last updated September 2003

### Why am I given d4T as my medication?

- d4T (also called stavudine or Zerit) is a drug that is used in combination with other drugs to treat HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection.
- d4T blocks a protein called “Reverse Transcriptase”, as a result, it belongs to a class of drugs called Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (RTI). The HIV virus needs this protein to reproduce itself, so by blocking it the drug helps slow down HIV disease.
- Taking this medication can reduce the amount of virus in your body. It can also reduce your chance of getting sick from AIDS related illnesses, help you stay healthy longer or get your health back. It may also reduce the damage to your immune system.

### How do I take this medication?

- d4T comes in capsules of varying strengths of 20, 30 or 40 mg each.
- d4T is usually taken twice daily. If your weight is less than 60 kg or 130 pounds, the usual dose is 30 mg twice a day. If your weight is more than 60 kg or 130 pounds, the dose is 40 mg twice a day.
- d4T can be taken with or without food.
- d4T should be stored at room temperature in a dry place. Don't put the medicine in the bathroom or kitchen, as moisture may cause the medicine to lose its effectiveness.
- Keep it out of reach of children.

### What if I forget to take a dose?

- Take the dose you missed as soon as possible. However, if it is within 2 hours of your next dose, just continue with your regular schedule, do not double the dose.
- Recent studies have found that for the anti-HIV medications to work, all the medications need to be taken regularly and consistently. Missing or skipping doses of your medication may make it lose its effectiveness as the virus can change itself and become resistant to the medication.

### What are the side effects of d4T?

- The most serious side effects of d4T are:
- peripheral neuropathy (numbness, burning, tingling sensation, pain or weakness in the hands and feet)
- pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas). Symptoms can include sharp abdominal pain that goes through to your back, as well as nausea and vomiting.

If this happens, call your doctor right away. These symptoms are usually reversible if recognized early and the medication discontinued or reduced.



- Other side effects of d4T can include:
  - skin rash
  - headache
  - fatigue
  - abdominal discomfort
  - diarrhea
  - difficulty sleeping.

If you are experiencing side effects from the medication, call your doctor or pharmacist and discuss your symptoms with them.

Do not stop the medication or change your dose before you talk to your doctor or pharmacist, they may have suggestions of how you can manage the side effects without stopping the medication.

### **Can I take d4T with other medications?**

- d4T can interact with other drugs. It is important that you tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the prescription and non-prescription medications (including vitamins and herbs) that you are taking.
- In general, d4T should not be taken together with AZT (Retrovir) as they oppose the effect of each other.
- Other drugs that should be avoided taken together include ddC (Zalcitabine) which may also cause neuropathy.

### **Can I take d4T with alcohol or street drugs?**

- In general, it is advisable to avoid excessive amount of alcohol and street drugs while you are taking anti-HIV medications. Alcohol may interact with some of your medications. Do not skip a dose of your medication because you want a drink.

### **Can I take d4T if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?**

- d4T has been shown to reduce HIV transmission during pregnancy, if you are pregnant and HIV positive, please consult your doctor about taking medication.
- Since the HIV virus can be transmitted through breast milk, breast-feeding is not recommended in HIV positive women.

### **What other precautions do I need to know when taking d4T?**

- d4T may affect your liver. Keep your appointments with your physician for blood tests to check your liver function regularly.
- Make sure you have a continuous supply of the medication.
- d4T does not kill the virus or cure AIDS. It also does not prevent the transmission of HIV, so please remember to always take precautions if you are having sex (use latex condoms) or using drugs (use clean syringes).

**Copyright @ACAS 2001 & 2003.** This fact sheet is produced by ACAS (Asian Community AIDS Services) and is available in English, Chinese (Traditional and Simplified), Tagalog and Vietnamese. Funding for this project is provided by the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) and Health Canada. Copies can be downloaded at : [www.acas.org/treatment](http://www.acas.org/treatment). ACAS provides comprehensive support and case management services for Asian people living with HIV/AIDS; and HIV/AIDS prevention education to the east and southeast Asian Canadian populations in the Greater Toronto Area. ACAS is located at 33 Isabella Street, Suite 107, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2P7. Tel: (416)-963-4300, Fax: (416)-963-4371 Email: [support@acas.org](mailto:support@acas.org)

**Legal Disclaimer:** While we make every attempt to ensure the accuracy and reliability of information contained in this website/ fact sheet, the information provided here are designed for reference purposes only. These information should not be relied upon as a substitute for medical advice from a qualified professional health care provider and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a condition or illness. Please consult a physician if you have any concerns about your health, treatment regimen and questions related to HIV/AIDS. ACAS, its employees and board members will not be responsible for any loss or harm, however arising, from the use of, or reliance on this information.