



Ribavirin

Information for Patients

What is ribavirin?

Ribavirin is medicine that is sometimes taken as part of the treatment for hepatitis C. Not all patients will need to take ribavirin, but some will. When ribavirin is used, it is taken in combination with other hepatitis C antiviral medicines. In the past, ribavirin was used together with interferon injections. Ribavirin is still used, but interferon is not. Ribavirin should never be taken by itself. When treatment is completed, all hepatitis C medications should be discontinued on the same day.

How is ribavirin taken?

Ribavirin comes as either a 200 mg capsule or tablet and is taken by mouth. The dose is usually 2 or 3 capsules/tablets, twice a day, based on the patient's weight and degree of liver damage. During treatment, the dose of ribavirin may be changed based on certain test results. Ribavirin capsules/tablets should never be split, crushed, or chewed.

Is ribavirin taken with food?

Yes, ribavirin is taken with food to reduce nausea.

If you miss a dose:

If you miss a dose of ribavirin, take the missed dose as soon as possible the same day. Do not double the next dose.

What are the possible side effects of ribavirin?

- ▶ anemia (drop in red blood cell count)
- ▶ drop in white blood cell count
- ▶ insomnia (trouble sleeping)
- ▶ headache, fatigue
- ▶ rash, itching
- ▶ sore throat, cough, shortness of breath
- ▶ diarrhea, loss of appetite, nausea/vomiting

Are there any serious concerns about ribavirin?

Yes. **Ribavirin can cause birth defects.** It should never be taken by women who are pregnant OR by their male partners of women who are pregnant. Women should not become pregnant while taking ribavirin, AND they should not become pregnant while their male partner is taking ribavirin. Couples should also avoid pregnancy for 6 months after ribavirin has been discontinued by either partner who was taking it.

When ribavirin is used by patients of child-bearing potential, couples must use 2 forms of birth control for the entire period of time that either partner is taking ribavirin. The birth control must be continued for 6 months after the ribavirin is stopped. Finally, a pregnancy test should be given to women of child-bearing potential immediately before starting ribavirin, every month while on ribavirin, and every month for 6 months after ribavirin is discontinued.

Notify your provider if you have:

- ▶ concern that you could be pregnant
- ▶ severe allergic symptoms such as hives, wheezing, trouble breathing, swelling of the mouth, severe rash
- ▶ severe breathing problems or chest pain
- ▶ severe abdominal pain and diarrhea
- ▶ loss of vision
- ▶ confusion, brown urine, yellow eyes

If you experience chest pain or new or worsening shortness of breath, go to the emergency room.



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