

# Ziagen (abacavir) basics

**Works with other medicines to treat HIV infection.** Ziagen (abacavir) is a first-choice medication that is used with others to treat HIV. It's important that your doctor test you for allergic reactions to Ziagen (abacavir) before starting the medication.

## What to expect when starting

Here's when people typically experience benefits as well as some possible side effects. Your experience may be different.



† Data on frequency of side effects is not available.

## Tips from pharmacists

- Can be taken with or without food.
- Alcohol should be avoided when taking Ziagen (abacavir).
- Always practice safe sex while taking Ziagen (abacavir). Don't share needles or personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them.
- Immediately report any signs of liver problems (jaundice, dark urine, yellowing of eyes, etc.) or sensitivity reactions (rash, fever, fatigue, difficulty breathing, etc.) to your doctor.

## Risks and warnings

The FDA has identified these as possible serious or life-threatening risks with this medication. Contact your doctor if you experience any of these.

### Severe allergic reactions

Life-threatening allergic reactions to Ziagen (abacavir) have happened to people taking it as part of their HIV treatment. This usually happens in the first 6 weeks. Your doctor will do a genetic test to see if this can happen to you. Go to the emergency room right away if you have a high fever, rash, nausea and vomiting, fast heartbeat, dizziness or trouble breathing.

### Lactic acidosis & severe liver damage

Although rare, Ziagen (abacavir) can cause life-threatening liver damage. While people who've had liver problems are at more risk, it has happened to people who are otherwise healthy. Symptoms can include appetite loss, fast and shallow breathing, and sudden weakness. Go to the emergency room right away if this happens.

### Immune system reactivation

During the first few weeks of taking medications like Ziagen (abacavir) for your HIV, your immune system might start fighting off infections that it was too weak to fight before. Talk to your doctor about what to look for.