

Emtricitabine for HIV (Emtriva)

Emtricitabine slows the progress of HIV infection. It is one of a number of medicines that you will need to take regularly.

It is taken once daily, and can be taken either before or after meals.

Emtricitabine has been associated with some side-effects. Your doctor will discuss these with you before you start treatment.

About emtricitabine

Type of medicine	A nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor antiretroviral medicine
Used for	Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, in adults and children
Also called	Emtriva® Combination brands: Descovy®, Ictastan®, Truvada® (emtricitabine with tenofovir ; Atripla® (emtricitabine and efavirenz with tenofovir); Eviplera®, Odefsey® (emtricitabine and rilpivirine with tenofovir); Genvoya®, Stribild® (emtricitabine with tenofovir, cobicistat and elvitegravir); Biktarvy® (emtricitabine with bictegravir and tenofovir); Symtuza® (emtricitabine with cobicistat , darunavir and tenofovir)
Available as	Capsules and oral liquid medicine (Emtriva®). Combination brands available as tablets

Emtricitabine is an antiretroviral medicine. It is used for [human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\) infection](#). It slows the progress of HIV infection, but it is not a cure. HIV destroys cells in the body, called CD4 T cells. These cells are a type of white blood cell and are important because they are involved in protecting your body from infection. If left untreated, the HIV infection weakens your immune system so that your body cannot defend itself against bacteria, viruses and other germs. Emtricitabine slows down the progress of HIV infection by reducing the amount of virus in your body. It does this by stopping the virus from copying (replicating) itself.

Emtricitabine will be prescribed for you by a doctor who is a specialist. It belongs to a group of antiretroviral medicines known as nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs). It is given alongside a number of other antiretroviral medicines, as part of a combination therapy. Taking three or more antiretroviral medicines at the same time is more effective than taking one alone. Taking a combination of different medicines also reduces the risk that the virus will become resistant to any individual medicine. Some brands of emtricitabine contain other antiretroviral medicines also (see the list in the table above). Taking one of these brands helps to reduce the number of tablets you need to take each day. Not all of the information in this leaflet applies to the combination brands – please refer to the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside the pack for full details about these brands.

It is vital to take your antiretroviral medicines exactly as prescribed to maintain success and to help to prevent the virus from becoming resistant to the medicines. These medicines are usually taken for life.

Before taking emtricitabine

Some medicines are not suitable for people with certain conditions, and sometimes a medicine can only be used if extra care is taken. For these reasons, before you start taking emtricitabine it is important that your doctor knows:

- If you are pregnant, trying for a baby or breastfeeding.
- If you have any problems with the way your liver works, or if you have problems with the way your kidneys work.
- If you drink a lot of alcohol.

- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines.
- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine.

How to take emtricitabine

- Before you start the treatment, read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside your pack. It will give you more information about emtricitabine, and it will also provide you with a full list of the side-effects which you could experience from taking it.
- Take emtricitabine exactly as your doctor tells you to. It is taken once daily. Adults will usually be prescribed capsules/tablets to take, whereas children are likely to be supplied with liquid medicine (Emtriva® Oral Solution). Your doctor will tell you how much you should take for each dose.
- Try to take emtricitabine at the same time of day each day, as this will help you to remember to take it regularly. You can take emtricitabine either with or without food.
- If for any reason you are sick (vomit) within one hour of taking emtricitabine, you should take another dose. This is because the medicine will not have been absorbed by your body. If, however, you are sick more than one hour after taking a dose, there is no need to repeat the dose, as the medicine will already have been absorbed.
- If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember, providing it is within 12 hours of the time you should have taken it. If when you remember, it is more than 12 hours late, do not take the dose you missed but do remember to take your next dose when it is due. Do not take two doses together to make up for a forgotten dose.

Getting the most from your treatment

- Keep your regular appointments with your doctor so that your progress can be monitored. You are likely to need regular blood tests to check how well your medicines are working.

- It is important that you continue to take emtricitabine and your other antiretroviral treatment regularly. This will help to prevent the HIV from becoming resistant to the medicines you are taking. Even if you miss only a small number of doses, the virus can become resistant to treatment.
- If you develop an infection soon after you start the treatment, let your doctor know. As a result of taking emtricitabine, your immune system may start fighting an infection which was present before you started the treatment, but which you may not have been aware of.
- Follow carefully any advice your doctor gives to you about making lifestyle changes to reduce any risk of damage to your heart and blood vessels. These can include stopping smoking, eating healthily and taking regular exercise.
- Some people taking antiretroviral medicines develop changes to the way body fat is distributed in the body. This can result in changes to body image. Your doctor will discuss the possibility of this with you.
- Although treatment with antiretroviral medicines may reduce the risk of you passing HIV to others through sexual contact, it does not stop it. It is important that you use condoms.
- It is not uncommon for people with HIV to feel low or even depressed, especially soon after the diagnosis has been made and treatment has been started. If you have any feelings of depression, or any distressing thoughts about harming yourself then you should speak with your doctor **straightaway**.
- Some people who have taken antiretroviral medicines (particularly over a long time) have developed a condition called osteonecrosis. This is a bone disease where bone tissue dies because there is a reduced blood supply to it. It leads to joint pains and stiffness, and can cause difficulties in movement. If you notice any of these symptoms, speak with your doctor.

- Emtricitabine has been associated with a serious side-effect in some people who have taken it. This is known as lactic acidosis. It is a problem where there is too much lactic acid in the blood. The symptoms associated with it are listed in the next section 'Can emtricitabine cause problems?'. If you develop any of the symptoms listed below, you must let your doctor know **straightaway**, as they can worsen, and may even become life-threatening.
- If you buy any medicines, supplements or herbal remedies 'over the counter', check with a pharmacist that they are suitable to take with emtricitabine and your other medicines. This is because some medicines interfere with antiretrovirals and can stop them from working properly.
- If you are having an operation or dental treatment, tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.
- Treatment for HIV is usually lifelong. Continue to take emtricitabine regularly, even if you feel well. This is to keep your immune system healthy.

Can emtricitabine cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, most medicines can cause unwanted side-effects although not everyone experiences them. The table below contains some of the most common ones associated with emtricitabine. You will find a full list in the manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with your medicine. You should, however, speak with your doctor if you develop any of the following side-effects. This is because some of the common side-effects of emtricitabine are similar to the symptoms of lactic acidosis - a less common but more serious problem.

Very common emtricitabine side-effects (these affect more than 1 in 10 people)	What can I do if I experience this?
Feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting), tummy (abdominal) pain, wind, indigestion	Stick to simple meals - avoid fatty or spicy food. If it continues, speak with your doctor
Diarrhoea	Drink plenty of water
Headache	Drink plenty of water and ask a pharmacist to recommend a suitable painkiller. If the headaches continue, let your doctor know
Common emtricitabine side-effects (these affect fewer than 1 in 10 people)	What can I do if I experience this?
Feeling dizzy, tired or weak	Do not drive and do not use tools or machines while affected. If this continues, speak with your doctor
Changes in skin colour and allergic-type rashes, difficulties sleeping, abnormal dreams, muscle aches and pains, and changes to some blood tests (your doctor will monitor for these)	If any of these become troublesome, speak with your doctor

Your doctor will discuss with you the possibility of lactic acidosis occurring. Let your doctor know straightaway if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting), tummy pain, loss of appetite, loss of weight, feeling weak or dizzy, and fast or gasping breathing.

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to the medicine, speak with your doctor or pharmacist for further advice.

How to store emtricitabine

- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.
- Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.
- Store unopened bottles of emtricitabine liquid medicine in a refrigerator. Once a bottle has been opened it can be stored out of the refrigerator, but it must be in a cool place. Opened bottles keep for 45 days – after this time, make sure you have a fresh supply.

Important information about all medicines

Never take more than the prescribed dose. If you suspect that you or someone else might have taken an overdose of this medicine, go to the accident and emergency department of your local hospital at once. Take the container with you, even if it is empty.

This medicine is for you. Never give it to other people even if their condition appears to be the same as yours.

Do not keep out-of-date or unwanted medicines. Take them to your local pharmacy which will dispose of them for you.

If you have any questions about this medicine ask your pharmacist.

If you experience side effects, you can report them online through the [Yellow Card website](#).

Further reading

- [Manufacturer's PIL, Emtriva® 200 mg hard capsules](#); Gilead Sciences Ltd, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated January 2021.
- [Manufacturer's PIL, Emtriva® 10 mg/ml oral solution](#); Gilead Sciences Ltd, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated January 2021.
- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.

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