Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Ribavirin (Systemic

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Warning

- Do not take this drug alone to treat hepatitis C infection.
- A severe blood problem called hemolytic anemia has happened with this drug. This can make heart disease worse and lead to heart attacks, which can be deadly. Tell your doctor if you have ever had heart problems. Get medical help right away if you have chest pain while taking this drug.
- Do not take this drug if you are pregnant. Use during pregnancy may cause birth defects or loss of the unborn baby.
- If you are able to get pregnant, a pregnancy test will be done before starting this drug, while you take this drug, and for 9 months after your last dose.
- If you may become pregnant, you must use birth control while taking this drug and for 9 months after the last dose. If you get pregnant, call your doctor right away.
- Do not take this drug if you are a male with a sex partner who is pregnant.
- If your sex partner may get pregnant, protect your partner from pregnancy during treatment and for 6 months after your last dose.
- If your sex partner gets pregnant while you take this drug or within 6 months after your last dose, call your doctor right away.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat hepatitis C infection.
- This drug may be used along with interferon or peginterferon. If you are using one of these drugs, read the patient fact sheet that comes with it.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have any of these health problems: Autoimmune hepatitis, liver problems other than hepatitis C, kidney disease, sickle cell anemia, or thalassemia major.
- If you are taking didanosine.
- If you are able to get pregnant but are not using birth control or if you are planning to get pregnant while taking this drug or within 9 months after your last dose.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Have your blood work and lung function checked as you have been told by your doctor.
- You may need to have an ECG checked before starting this drug and while taking it. Talk with your doctor.
- This drug does not stop the spread of hepatitis to others through blood, body fluids, or having sex. Do not have any kind of sex without using a condom. Do not share injection equipment like needles. Do not share personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them like toothbrushes

or razors. Talk with your doctor or other health care provider about safe sex and other ways to prevent spreading hepatitis to others.

- Watch for gout attacks.
- Avoid drinking alcohol. Alcohol may make liver disease worse.
- Take good care of your teeth. See a dentist often.
- If you throw up, rinse your mouth out well.
- You may have more chance of getting an infection. Wash hands often. Stay away from people with infections, colds, or flu.
- If you are 50 or older, use this drug with care. The risk of some side effects may be higher.
- This drug may affect growth in children and teens in some cases. They may need regular growth checks. Talk with the doctor.
- If giving this drug to your child and your child's weight changes, talk with the doctor. The dose of this drug may need to be changed.
- This drug may affect being able to father a child. Talk with the doctor.
- If you have sex without using birth control, if you think you may be pregnant, or if you miss your period, call your doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor if you are breast-feeding. You will need to talk about any risks to your baby.

What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.

- Signs of a pancreas problem (pancreatitis) like very bad stomach pain, very bad back pain, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.
- Change in eyesight.
- Loss of eyesight.
- Pale skin.
- Feeling confused.
- Not able to focus.
- Period (menstrual) changes.
- Drugs like this one have raised the chance of suicidal thoughts or actions in children and young adults. The risk may be greater in people who have had these thoughts or actions in the past. All people who take this drug need to be watched closely. Call the doctor right away if signs like depression, nervousness, restlessness, grouchiness, panic attacks, or changes in mood or actions are new or worse. Call the doctor right away if any thoughts or actions of suicide occur.
- Low blood cell counts have happened with this drug. If blood cell counts get very low, this can lead to bleeding problems, infections, or anemia. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of infection like fever, chills, or sore throat; any unexplained bruising or bleeding; or if you feel very tired or weak.
- Some people have had lung problems with this drug. Sometimes, this has been deadly. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of lung problems like shortness of breath or other trouble breathing, cough that is new or worse, or fever.
- A severe skin reaction (Stevens-Johnson syndrome/toxic epidermal necrolysis) may happen. It can cause severe health problems that may not go away, and sometimes death. Get medical help right away if you have signs like red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin (with or without fever); red or irritated eyes; or sores in your mouth, throat, nose, or eyes.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Trouble sleeping.
- Constipation, diarrhea, stomach pain, upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.
- Hair loss.
- Muscle or joint pain.
- Dizziness.
- Dry skin.
- Dry mouth.
- Change in taste.
- Weight loss.
- Feeling tired.
- Flu-like signs. These include headache, weakness, fever, shakes, aches, pains, and sweating.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

All products:

- Take with food.
- Drink lots of noncaffeine liquids unless told to drink less liquid by your doctor.
- Keep taking this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.
- It is important that you do not miss or skip a dose of this drug during treatment.
- Do not take this drug for longer than you were told by your doctor.

Tablets:

- If you have trouble swallowing, talk with your doctor.

Capsules:

- Swallow whole. Do not chew, break, or crush.
- Do not open the capsules.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.
- If you are not sure what to do if you miss a dose, call your doctor.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

- Store at room temperature with the lid tightly closed.
- Store in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.

- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- This drug comes with an extra patient fact sheet called a Medication Guide. Read it with care. Read it again each time this drug is refilled. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with the doctor, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved

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If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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