**How does this medication work?**

Didanosine or ddI is an antiretroviral drug that acts by preventing multiplication of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Didanosine is a nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor. It acts by inhibiting the reverse transcriptase enzyme. The virus needs reverse transcriptase to multiply in the body.

Didanosine is used in combination with other antiretroviral drugs to slow progression of the disease and reduce the risk of opportunistic infections (AIDS-related infections).

Didanosine does not cure AIDS or kill the virus. There is a permanent risk of transmitting HIV either through sexual or blood contact. It is therefore essential that precautions always be taken (latex condoms, clean syringes, etc.)

Fertile women must use an effective means of birth control.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do I take this medication?</th>
<th>Didanosine must be taken at least 30 minutes before eating or two hours after.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your dosage</strong></td>
<td>Food increases stomach acidity, hindering the absorption and efficacy of didanosine.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For this reason, didanosine tablets contain an antacid. Regardless of the dose prescribed for you, you must take at least two tablets every time (except for small children). This minimum of two didanosine tablets contains sufficient antacid for satisfactory absorption.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid taking didanosine with acidic beverages (grapefruit juice, orange juice, tomato juice, cranberry juice, lemonade, cola, etc). These can decrease absorption and lessen the efficacy of didanosine. You can, however, drink them at other times, without didanosine.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chew the tablets or dissolve them in 30 mL (2 tablespoons) of water. You can also dissolve the tablets in water and add apple juice to improve the taste. The dissolved tablets will remain stable for one hour at room temperature. Do not swallow the tablets whole.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is important to take your antiretroviral medicine properly - i.e. never forget a dose, follow the instructions on how to take the medicine, and always keep on with your treatment.</td>
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<td>It is important to take didanosine regularly at the same time every day, and to keep to the schedule as closely as possible.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adherence to therapy will help prevent resistance (HIV’s ability to recognize and defeat the effect of the medication) and avoid treatment failure (loss of efficacy of the antiretroviral treatment), which would result in an increased viral load and a lower number of CD4 cells, which are the ones that help your body fight infection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nearly everyone tends to relax their compliance with the treatment at some point. The key to success is motivation. Consult members of your care team so that they can explain the benefits of the treatment you are having. They can also suggest ways that will help you maintain it properly.

*Never stop your treatment without first speaking to your doctor.*

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

Take the dose you missed as soon as possible and then continue with your regular schedule.

If it is nearly time for your next dose, however, just take that one at the usual time. Do not double up doses.

**What are the side effects of this medication?**

The main side effect of didanosine is pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas). Inform your doctor immediately if you have abdominal pain with nausea and vomiting. This side effect is usually reversible if you contact your doctor without delay.

Other side effects that may be attributable to didanosine include peripheral neuropathy: numbness, tingling, burning sensation, pain or weakness in the hands or feet. This side effect may be reversible if you contact your doctor without delay.

Diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain are other side effects experienced with didanosine. If these effects persist, consult your pharmacist, your doctor or your dietician. They can help you find ways to better manage these side effects.

Adverse effects related to antiretroviral therapy have recently been reported, such as diabetes, elevated cholesterol and triglyceride concentrations (blood fat levels), ingrowing toenails, dry skin, an accumulation of fat around the waist and, more rarely, the neck, accompanied by thinning of the legs, arms, buttocks and face. The medications responsible for these effects and the underlying mechanism are as yet unknown.

Didanosine may be responsible for a side effect known as lactic acidosis (an increase in lactate levels in the blood). Your doctor will check for this side effect by taking regular blood samples. If you experience nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, weight loss, great fatigue, or find you have difficulty in breathing, contact your doctor without delay. These symptoms usually have no serious consequences, but might indicate the onset of lactic acidosis, which is more serious.

Headaches, rash, itchiness, chills, and fever have also been associated with didanosine.

Inform your doctor and your pharmacist of any troublesome side effects.

**Can I take didanosine with my other medications?**

Didanosine can decrease the absorption and efficacy of a number of drugs. Some doctors and pharmacists recommend that it be taken alone, that is, at least one hour after any other medication.

In addition, when some medications are combined with didanosine, the risk of pancreatitis or peripheral neuropathy may increase.

Consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking any new prescription or non-prescription medication, natural product or recreational drug.

**Can I drink alcohol if I’m on didanosine?**

Avoid excessive or regular consumption of alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, spirits), as this may interact with some of your medications.

However, do not miss a dose of your medication because you want to have an alcoholic drink. Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, reasonable (social) consumption should not damage your health.
**What if I’m pregnant or breast-feeding?**

It is not known if didanosine can harm a human fetus. Pregnant women have experienced serious side effects when taking didanosine in combination with stavudine (d4T or Zerit®) and other HIV medicines. Talk to your doctor if you want to take didanosine and are pregnant or want to become pregnant.

Since the virus can be transmitted through maternal milk, breast-feeding is not recommended in HIV-positive women.

**General Advice**

Keep your appointments with your doctor and the care team, so that your health can be closely monitored.

If you have any questions about your medications or need help to schedule when to take them, please contact your doctor or pharmacist, who is familiar with what you are taking.

**Contact person:** __________________________

**Telephone:** __________________________

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**Storage**

Keep didanosine **tablets** in a dry place at room temperature (15-30°C or 59-86°F). Avoid humidity (bathrooms, etc.).

Keep the didanosine **oral solution** in the refrigerator, for a maximum duration of 30 days.

Keep out of sight and reach of children.