

What is ribavirin and what does it do?

Ribavirin is used to treat hepatitis C in combination with other medication. Ribavirin stops replication of many types of virus, including the hepatitis C viruses, however its exact mechanism is unknown. It should always be taken with another anti-hepatitis C treatment.

How do I take my ribavirin tablets?

The number of ribavirin tablets needed per day is based on your weight and will be calculated by your prescriber. You should take the daily dose in two divided doses, ideally 12 hours apart. Tablets should be taken with food and swallowed whole.

Are there any side effects of Ribavirin?

It is common for patients to experience unwanted effects whilst taking ribavirin. Known side effects include:

- Anaemia
- Depression
- Sleeplessness or Insomnia
- Headache or dizziness
- Irritability or Lack of concentration
- Hair loss, Dermatitis, itchy or dry skin
- Shortness of breath or cough
- High temperatures, shivering, weakness or fatigue
- Diarrhoea, feeling sick or abdominal pain

If you experience any adverse effects you should contact your nurse specialist or prescriber. Some patients may require a dose adjustment.

Do I need to have any tests or be monitored because I take ribavirin?

Because of the effects ribavirin can cause you will have regular blood tests to monitor your Iron levels, red and white blood cells and liver function. These will usually be linked with your clinic visits.

Special warnings and precautions when taking ribavirin

Ribavirin is known to harm the development of unborn children and therefore should not be taken during pregnancy. If you or your partner is of a child-bearing age it is important that you take precautions to prevent pregnancy with effective contraception.

Breast-feeding mothers should stop breast-feeding whilst on ribavirin.

You should not take ribavirin if you have had problems with your heart (including a heart attack) in the last six months, or if you have a blood disorder (e.g. thalassaemia or sickle cell anaemia).

Are there any problems taking ribavirin with any other medications?

Ribavirin can be problematic when taken with medicines for the treatment of HIV. If you are taking medicines for HIV then these should be discussed with your doctor or pharmacist to check they are safe to take together.

Only take tablets prescribed for you by your doctor and check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist before taking any new medicines.

Further information

Further information about your tablet can be found in the patient information leaflet found in the tablet/capsule box or on the container.

Further information on hepatitis C can be found on the following websites:

- The British Liver Trust (www.britishlivertrust.org.uk)
- The Hepatitis C Trust (www.hepctrust.org.uk)
- www.patient.co.uk
- www.easternliver.net