



Symtuza

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What is *Symtuza*?

Symtuza is a medication used to treat HIV. It is a combination of antiretroviral drugs in one pill, taken once a day.

It combines 800mg darunavir, 200mg emtricitabine and 10mg tenofovir alafenamide, along with 150mg cobicistat, in a yellow tablet. The tablet has 'JG' on one side and '8121' on the other side.

How does *Symtuza* work?

Symtuza combines different drugs in one pill. Two of the drugs (emtricitabine and tenofovir alafenamide) are from a class of drugs known as NRTIs (nucleoside/nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitors) and one drug (darunavir) is a protease inhibitor. Each drug class works against HIV in a different way. Cobicistat is a drug used as a boosting agent to increase the effect of darunavir.

The aim of HIV treatment is to reduce the level of HIV (the 'viral load') in your body until it is undetectable – usually less than 50 copies of virus per ml of blood. Taking HIV treatment and having an undetectable viral load protects your immune system and stops HIV being passed on to someone else during sex.

How do I take *Symtuza*?

You should take *Symtuza* once a day with food – you should take it within half an hour of having a meal or snack. The tablet should be swallowed whole – don't chew, crush or split it.

HIV treatment works best if you take it every day, ideally at the same time each day. It may help to set an alarm, e.g. on your mobile phone, to remind you. If you forget to take a dose of *Symtuza* and realise within 12 hours of the time you usually take it, take it as soon as possible, with food, then take your next dose at your usual time. If you realise with less than 12 hours left until your next dose, don't take a double dose, just skip the dose you've forgotten and then carry on with your normal routine.

What are the side-effects of *Symtuza*?

All medicines have possible side-effects. It's a good idea to talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about what to expect before you start taking any medication, and how to manage any side-effects which occur.



A full list of side-effects, including less common side-effects, can be found in the patient information leaflet that comes with *Symtuza*.

Side-effects can be described as:

Common – a side-effect that occurs in at least one in a hundred people (more than 1%) who take this drug.

Uncommon – a side-effect that occurs in fewer than one in a hundred people (less than 1%) who take this drug.

Common side-effects of *Symtuza* include (most common in **bold**):

headache, diarrhoea, nausea (feeling sick), tiredness (fatigue), rash, allergic reaction (hypersensitivity), facial swelling, itching, loss of appetite, abnormal dreams, vomiting, abdominal pain, bloating, indigestion, flatulence, diabetes, raised lipid or liver or pancreatic enzyme or creatinine levels, dizziness, aching joints or muscles, feeling weak.

Does *Symtuza* interact with other drugs?

You should always tell your doctor and pharmacist about any other drugs or medication you are taking. That includes anything prescribed by another doctor, medicines you have bought from a high-street chemist, herbal and alternative treatments, and recreational or party drugs ('chems').

Some medicines or drugs are not safe if taken together – the interaction could cause increased, dangerous levels, or it could stop one or both of the drugs from working. Other drug interactions are less dangerous but still need to be taken seriously. If levels of one drug are affected, you may need to change the dose you take. This must only be done on the advice of your HIV doctor.

You must not take *Symtuza* with any of the following medicines:

- alfuzosin
- amiodarone
- avanafil
- carbamazepine
- colchicine (if you have kidney/liver problems)
- dihydroergotamine
- dronedarone
- ergotamine
- ergometrine
- lovastatin
- lurasidone



- methylergonovine
- midazolam
- phenobarbital
- phenytoin
- pimozone
- quetiapine
- quinidine
- ranolazine
- rifampicin
- sertindole
- sildenafil (used for pulmonary arterial hypertension)
- simvastatin
- St John's wort
- ticagrelor
- triazolam

There are a number of other drugs which can be affected by *Symtuza*, so your doctor or pharmacist may prescribe a different dose. This includes some commonly prescribed drugs such as hormonal contraceptives and hormone replacement therapy, erectile dysfunction drugs, psychiatric drugs, and drugs used to treat opioid dependence, asthma, infections and pain.

The patient information leaflet which comes with your *Symtuza* has a fuller list of medicines which should be avoided, but it is very important to tell your doctor about any medicines you are taking.

Can I take *Symtuza* in pregnancy?

There are other things which are important to your health and HIV care, and which you and your doctor may take into account when making decisions about your treatment. For example, if you are considering having a baby, or want to start taking contraception.

Symtuza is not recommended for women who want to get pregnant, or who are pregnant, but it may be considered as an option. If you are planning to have a baby or think there is the possibility you might get pregnant, talk to your doctor about which drug combination would be best for you.

Talking to your doctor

If you have any concerns about your treatment or other aspects of your health, it's important to talk about these. For example, if you have any symptom or side-effect which may be from your treatment, or if you are finding it difficult to take your medication every day, one of your healthcare team will be able to help.



Building a relationship with a doctor may take time. You may feel very comfortable talking to your doctor, but some people find it more difficult, particularly when talking about sex, mental health, or symptoms they find embarrassing. It's also easy to forget things you wanted to talk about.

Preparing for an appointment can be very helpful. Take some time to think about what you are going to say. You might find it helpful to talk to someone else first, or to make some notes and bring them to your appointment. Our online tool *Talking points* may help you to prepare for your next appointment – visit www.aidsmap.com/talking-points

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We recommend that this information should always be used in conjunction with professional medical advice.

This factsheet is produced by an organisation called NAM, and has been reviewed by members of our volunteer panels of people living with HIV and medical professionals. We welcome your feedback on our information resources.

NAM provides up-to-date and impartial HIV information. Please visit us at our website where you can read the latest HIV news and sign up for free email updates.

NAM, Acorn House, 314-320 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP.

Email info@nam.org.uk
Web www.aidsmap.com

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