

Fluconazole

Fluconazole is an anti-fungal drug of the triazole class used to treat infections caused by fungi. Anti fungal or antimycotic medications fight infections caused by different kinds of fungus.

When should Fluconazole be used?

Fluconazole is used when fungal infections can't be treated with skin lotions, creams or gels. It works against different types of fungus in people with HIV, including candidiasis or thrush.

Many germs live in our bodies or are common in our surroundings. A healthy immune system can fight them off or keep them under control. However, HIV infection can weaken the immune system. Infections that take advantage of weakened immune systems are called "opportunistic infections." People with advanced HIV disease can get opportunistic infections.

Candidiasis infections are very common and may develop into a serious condition in people with HIV. For more information on candidiasis, please read InfoVIHtal #29. Cryptococcal meningitis is another opportunistic infection. Fluconazole has been approved to treat both of these infections. Some doctors also use fluconazole to treat other opportunistic infections caused by fungus.

What about drug resistance?

Whenever you begin to take medication, it is strongly recommended that you make sure you take all your doses exactly as they were prescribed. Many people stop their treatment when they feel better. This is not a good idea, since a drug course is prescribed to ensure that our body is capable of eliminating all the external agents for which the medication was given.

If the drug doesn't kill all the germs because its course is interrupted, the germs might change (mutate), thereby developing what is called "drug resistance." Thus, the infection would go on, even if the same treatment were resumed.

For example, if you are taking fluconazole to fight candidiasis and you miss some doses, the candida fungi could develop resistance to fluconazole. Then you would have to begin a course with a different drug or combination of drugs to fight candidiasis.

Many doctors prefer to prescribe creams or lozenges that dissolve in the mouth. Candidiasis is less likely to develop resistance when the treatment is applied directly to the infection instead of through the whole body.

How is it taken?

Fluconazole is available in different forms. It comes in tablets of 50, 100, 150, or 250 milligrams (mg). It is also available in granules to prepare a liquid form, and as a liquid for intravenous use. The dose and length of time you will take it depend on the type of infection you have. If you have had kidney problems, your doctor might need to reduce your dose of fluconazole.

You can take fluconazole with or without food.

What are the side effects?

The most common side effects of fluconazole are headache, nausea, and pain in the abdomen. A few people get diarrhea. Most antiretroviral medications (ARVs) cause problems in the digestive system. Fluconazole could make those problems worse.

Fluconazole can cause liver damage. Your doctor will need to watch your lab results carefully for any sign of liver damage. Let your doctor know if your urine gets dark or your bowel movements get light-colored.

Fluconazole can also cause kidney damage. Let your doctor know if you notice a rapid increase in your weight, or if any part of your body gets swollen.

In rare cases, fluconazole can cause a serious reaction (Stevens-Johnson syndrome) that shows up as a skin rash.

Pregnant women or women who are breastfeeding should not take fluconazole.

How does it react with other drugs?

Fluconazole is processed mostly by the kidneys. It does not interact very much with drugs that use the liver, including ARVs. However, fluconazole interacts with several other types of drugs. These include some blood thinners, seizure medications, water pills (diuretics), pills to lower blood sugar, and other antibiotics. Be sure your doctor knows about all the medications you are taking or intend to take.

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