

Tacrolimus

Immediate Release (IR) and Extended Release (ER) Formulations



What is tacrolimus?

- An immunosuppressant that is used to control symptoms and prevent flare-ups in diseases of the immune system such as glomerulonephritis (inflammation of the kidneys).
- Tacrolimus lowers your body's harmful response to diseases of the immune system by decreasing the production of lymphocytes, a type of white blood cells. It is often used with other medications such as prednisone.
- Both formulations are available as 0.5 mg, 1 mg and 5 mg capsules. The capsules should be swallowed whole. Do not cut, crush or chew the capsules.

How do I use it?

- If you have a prescription for Tacrolimus IR, take the medication regularly twice daily, about 12 hours apart. If you have a prescription for Tacrolimus ER, take the medication daily in the morning, about the same time each day.
- The medication can be taken with or without food but always take it the same way each time.
- Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice with tacrolimus.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- For the tacrolimus IR, take the missed dose as soon as you remember if it is within 6 hours of your usual dosage time. If it is more than 6 hours, skip the dose and go back to your normal schedule
- For tacrolimus ER, take the missed dose as soon as you remember if it is within 14 hours of the usual dosage time. If it is more than 14 hours, skip the dose and go back to your normal schedule.
- Do not “double-up” the dose as this may increase the side effects.
- Keep a diary of late or missed doses because the dose of tacrolimus is adjusted based on the level of drug in your body.
- It is very important to take each dose of tacrolimus because missing even a few doses may cause flare-ups of your symptoms.
- The dose of tacrolimus is based on your weight and is specific to your medical condition. Do not change your dose without talking to your doctor or pharmacist.

What side effects should I expect?

- Check your blood work regularly; this is important to detect and minimize the side effects of tacrolimus.

- The blood level of tacrolimus is checked at times to ensure the right amount of medication is in your body. If tacrolimus level is requested, go to the laboratory in the morning on the day of the blood work at the time you would normally take your medication. Do not take the tacrolimus dose until your blood work is done and take the dose as soon as possible afterward.
- Common side effects include nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, loss of appetite, hair thinning, headache, tremors, difficulty sleeping, tiredness or muscle cramps. Some side effects may decrease as your body gets used to the medication. If these symptoms continue or become bothersome, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Tacrolimus may worsen kidney function and cause high blood pressure, electrolyte changes, high blood sugars or high cholesterol. Your blood work will be reviewed by your doctor.
- Tacrolimus may cause low red blood cells (anemia) and low platelets in the body. Contact your doctor if you notice any unusual tiredness, bleeding or easy bruising.
- Since tacrolimus lowers your body's ability to fight off infections, wash your hands often and stay away from people with infections, colds or flu. Contact your doctor right away if you feel you may have a cold or other infection, e.g. if you experience high fever, chills, very bad sore throat, chest congestion, pain with passing urine, etc.

- You may get sunburned more easily. Avoid sun, sunlamps, and tanning beds. Use sunscreen and wear clothing and eyewear that protect you from the sun.
- Tacrolimus may add to your chance of getting a type of cancer called lymphoma and other cancers. Contact your family doctor to ensure you have the recommended screening tests performed for people of your age and sex.

Drug interactions with tacrolimus

- Tacrolimus can interact with a large number of medications.
- You should discuss with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new medications (non prescription and prescription), herbal products or vitamins.
- Grapefruit and grapefruit juice can affect the absorption of tacrolimus, so do not eat any grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while taking tacrolimus.
- Do not receive any vaccines without talking to your doctor because the use with tacrolimus may either increase your chance of an infection or make the vaccine not work as well.

Is tacrolimus harmful during pregnancy and breastfeeding?

- Talk to your doctor about taking tacrolimus if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding. It is best to have this talk before becoming pregnant.