

# Ganciclovir

Names	The generic drug name is ganciclovir (gan-SYE-kloe-vir). Cytovene®, Cytovene-IV®, Vitrasert® are brand drug names. There may be other names for this medication.
How is it Administered?	This medication comes as an intravenous (injected into a vein) that is usually infused over 1 hour. It is also available as a capsule. Once the infection is under control, this medication may be taken by mouth.
What is it Used For?	Ganciclovir belongs to the family of medicines called antivirals. Antivirals treat infections caused by viruses. Ganciclovir is used to treat a specific virus called cytomegalovirus or CMV.
How Does it Work?	Ganciclovir treats viral infections by interfering with an enzyme that the virus uses to grow and reproduce.
What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin?	<p>Tell your doctor if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• have had an allergic reaction to ganciclovir, acyclovir (Zovirax®), valganciclovir (Valcyte®), or other medication</li><li>• have a low platelet, red or white blood cell count; are taking medications that interfere with normal clotting such as warfarin (Coumadin®); or have any other blood or bleeding problem</li><li>• have eye problems other than CMV retinitis, kidney or liver disease, mental illness, or seizures</li><li>• have received or are receiving radiation therapy</li><li>• have any type of infection</li><li>• are pregnant or breastfeeding</li></ul> <p><b>This drug may interact with other medications, increasing or decreasing their effectiveness or causing harmful side effects. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal or diet supplements that you are taking.</b></p>

### What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Decreased levels of red blood cells, white blood cells, or platelets (increased risk for fatigue, infections, or bleeding)
- Digestion problems: loss of appetite, belching, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or constipation
- Dry mouth, mouth sores
- Tiredness, dizziness
- Unusual dreams, nervousness, depression
- Sweating, flushing
- Joint or muscle pain or cramps

### How Can I Manage These Side Effects?

- To help avoid infections, stay away from people with colds, flu, or other infections. Talk to your doctor before you have any vaccinations. Wash your hands often.
- To help prevent bleeding problems, be careful when handling sharp objects. Stay away from rough sports or other situations where you could be bruised or injured. Use an electric razor. Be careful when using a toothbrush or dental floss (your doctor may recommend other ways to clean your teeth and gums).
- Mouth care is very important. To minimize mouth problems, rinse your mouth with a mixture of ½ teaspoon of baking soda in 8 ounces of water after every meal and at bedtime. Brush your teeth and gums often with a soft toothbrush. (Soften it further by running it under warm water). Avoid smoking, alcohol, and mouthwashes that contain alcohol. Check with your medical doctor before having any dental work done.
- Ask your doctor about medication to help prevent or lessen nausea, or vomiting.
- If you develop a rash or skin irritation, do not put anything on it unless it is approved by your doctor. Use sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher when you are outdoors, even for a short time. Cover up when you are out in the sun.

## When Should I Call the Doctor?

### **Call your doctor immediately if you:**

- have signs of an allergic reaction: rash, hives, itching, difficulty breathing or swallowing, fast heartbeat
- are seeing specks, flashes of light, or a dark curtain over everything
- signs of infection: **temperature of 100.4° F (38° C) or above**, chills, sore throat, or sores in your mouth
- signs of low blood counts: pale skin, excessive fatigue, headache, dizziness, confusion, fast heartbeat, problems sleeping, weakness, shortness of breath, unusual bleeding or bruising

**Talk to your doctor** if you have nausea or other symptom not relieved by prescribed medication or that is preventing you from eating or drinking.

## What Else Should I Know About Ganciclovir?

- *Take ganciclovir capsules with a full glass of water and food.*
- Take ganciclovir on a regular schedule. This medicine works best when there is a constant amount in the blood.
- Do not open or crush tablets.
- Continue to take all the ganciclovir prescribed for you, even if you begin to feel better.
- Both men and women should use effective birth control during treatment and for 90 days afterwards. A barrier method (condom) is recommended. This drug may be harmful to a fetus.
- Drink at least 2-3 quarts of fluid, especially water, every 24 hours, unless your doctor tells you to limit your fluids. This will help minimize any damaging effects to your kidneys.
- Paleness and fatigue may be signs of anemia (a low level of red blood cells). Your doctor will order regular blood tests – keep all appointments with your doctor and lab.
- Ganciclovir may make you drowsy, dizzy, unsteady, or confused. Do not drive a car or operate machinery until you know how this medication affects you.
- If you are having surgery tell the doctor or dentist that you are taking ganciclovir.
- For more information, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.