

# Adherence tips

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You need to take your HIV treatment properly for it to work. The word used for taking your treatment properly is adherence.

A common reason why people miss doses of their anti-HIV drugs is because they simply forget to take them.

If you forget to take a dose of your medicine, try and learn from the experience so you can reduce the risk of it happening again.

## Keeping a diary

Try keeping a diary where you record taking each dose of your medicine. Your HIV doctor or pharmacist might have a schedule of your daily doses that you can tick as you take them.

## Jogging your memory

Some people find that setting an alarm on their watch or mobile phone, or setting an email alert, helps them to remember to take their medication. There are also some smartphone apps available which will send you a reminder.

If you live with someone who knows about your HIV status, perhaps your partner, a family member or flatmate, you could ask them to help you remember to take your medication.

Making a connection between taking your medication and something else you do every day can be a helpful way of adding it to your routine. For example, if you take your medication before you go to sleep you could keep your medication next to your bed.

## Pill boxes

Some people find pill boxes useful. These have separate compartments into which you can put each dose of your medicine. Some people find it helpful to fill their pill box at the start of the week so they can keep track of exactly which pills they have taken.

Pill boxes might be available for free from your HIV clinic.

## Changes to your routine

Simple changes to your daily routine, for example getting up earlier or later, or going out for the night, might mean that you forget to take your medicine.

Some people keep doses of their medication in different places in case they forget to take their medication. For example in their coat pocket or bag, at work, in the glove compartment of their car, or at a friend's or relation's home. But always make sure that medicines are stored out of the reach of children. And remember, medicines can go out of date and some need to be kept at a certain temperature.

## Travelling with your medication

You might find the following information useful if you are planning to travel with your HIV medicines.

Remember to take enough medicine with you if you are going to be away from home, even if it is just overnight.

Carry medicines in your hand luggage. This means it's easier to get to and is less likely to get lost.

If you are travelling to another time zone you might need to change the time you take your medicines. There are two ways of doing this. Some people change their dosing schedule to fit in with their new time zone. But this could mean that there is a very long, or short, gap between the doses of your medicine when you make the change. Other people try and overcome this by gradually adjusting the time they take their medicine, for example by

an hour every day in the week before they travel so it fits in with their new time zone.

Taking a break from treatment when you travel can have risks, including the development of drug-resistant HIV. Do not stop taking your medicines without discussing this with your doctor.

## Food and drink

Keeping a bottle of water handy can be helpful. Some medicines need to be taken with a meal or snack; if this is the case for you, it may be helpful to keep a snack handy too.

## Answering questions about your medication

You might not always be able to take your medicines in private. Some people might ask you why you need to take pills if they see you taking them in public. If you don't want to tell them that it's for HIV, you could try saying that they are vitamin tablets.

## Medications for other conditions

You may sometimes be prescribed treatment for other health problems, by your GP, or another health professional. The tips in this factsheet may also be helpful for you when remembering to take those treatments.

But having to take more treatments can make adherence more difficult – particularly if you have to take them at different times of day or in a different way. If you're finding it difficult, or find yourself forgetting which treatments to take when, talk to your doctor or another member of your healthcare team.

It's important to tell your doctor or pharmacist about other drugs you are taking, including drugs prescribed by another doctor, drugs you buy from a high-street chemist, herbal remedies and recreational drugs. Sometimes drugs interact with one another and this can affect how well they work, as well as sometimes causing side-effects.

## Talking to your doctor

It's a good idea to talk to your doctor if you are forgetting to take a lot of your doses. Help is available to support you in taking your medication. Or it might be possible to change your treatment so that your medicines are easier to take.

If you have questions or concerns about your treatment, your doctor or someone else in your clinic such as a nurse, health adviser or pharmacist, should be happy to talk to you about it.

For many people, understanding how their treatment works and feeling involved in decisions about their care is a very important motivation.

You might find it helpful to write down questions or things you want to talk about before your appointment. You may also find it helpful to take notes or to ask your doctor to write things down for you to remind you what was said when you get home.