

Adherence

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Adherence is the term that is used to describe taking your medicines properly.

You'll get the most benefit from your medicines if you take them properly.

Taking your HIV treatment properly is very important. If you don't this can mean that HIV has a chance to change and become resistant to the anti-HIV drugs you are taking. It might also mean that your HIV becomes resistant to anti-HIV drugs similar to the ones you are taking.

Taking your HIV drugs properly means:

- Taking all the doses of your drugs. If you miss doses, this gives HIV a chance to become resistant.
- Taking your doses at the right time. If you take your medicine too early or too late it can be as bad as missing doses completely.
- Making sure you take your medicines in the right way. Some medicines need to be taken with food for them to work, but others need to be taken on an empty stomach. If you take your pills in the wrong way it can mean that you don't absorb enough of them to fight HIV, risking resistance.
- Making sure you don't take other drugs or medicines that interfere with your body's ability to process your HIV treatment. Always tell your HIV doctor about any other medicines you are taking. This includes ones another doctor has given you or that you have bought from a chemist. It's also a good idea to tell your doctor about any recreational drugs you are taking. Interactions between medicines or drugs can mean that not enough of one medicine reaches your blood. Or it can mean that you get too much of a medicine or drug, and that can be dangerous.

The best results of HIV treatment are seen in people who take all or nearly all their doses of medicine correctly. So you should aim to take all your doses. The minimum level of adherence needed for HIV treatment to work properly is 95%. If you're taking your treatment once a day that means missing (or taking incorrectly) no more than one dose a month. If you're taking your treatment twice a day, then 95% adherence means missing (or incorrectly taking) no more than three doses a month.

Every time your doctor prescribes a medicine to you, they or the pharmacist should tell you what you need to do to take it properly. They should also give you written information to take away, about your treatment, explaining how you take it.

If you're unsure about anything, it makes good sense to ask questions.

Taking HIV treatment is a long-term commitment. It is therefore important that the treatment you take fits in with the way you live your life. Don't be frightened to tell your doctor if you think you'll find a treatment difficult to take properly. There might be alternatives.

If you are taking HIV treatment for the first time, then there is a good chance that your treatment will consist of no more than a few pills taken once or twice a day. And treatment is now available that consists of just one pill, once a day.

Support with treatment

Most people will forget to take a dose of their medicine at some time. Don't worry too much if this happens occasionally. But talk to your doctor or someone else in your healthcare team if you are missing a lot of your doses.

There are things you can do to help you take your medicines properly. For example, some people keep a diary, or set an alarm. For other people, pill boxes help to keep track of doses and these are available from your HIV clinic.

If you're having problems taking your treatment because of side-effects, it might be possible to change to a treatment that you find easier to take.

There may be other reasons why you are finding it difficult to take your treatment as prescribed. Talking to your doctor, someone in your healthcare team, or another person you trust can help you to deal with any problems you are experiencing.