

Late drug doses

Last updated March 2012/ Due for review March 2014

For HIV treatment to work, you need to take it properly. This means:

- Taking all your doses.
- Taking your doses at the right time.
- Making sure that you take your doses with or without food as instructed.
- Making sure that you don't take other medicines or drugs that can interact with your anti-HIV drugs.

HIV treatment has the best results when you take all, or nearly all of your doses.

Late doses matter

Taking doses of your medicine late can be as bad as not taking your doses at all.

The safest approach is to aim to take all your doses at the right time and in the right way. But most people will either miss the occasional dose or take a dose late. Don't beat yourself up or worry too much if this only happens very rarely.

But if you are regularly taking your anti-HIV drugs late it could allow HIV to become resistant to your anti-HIV drugs. This could mean that your viral load increases, your CD4 cell count could fall, and you'd have a greater risk of becoming ill. Also, resistance can mean that there are fewer drugs available to you to treat your HIV.

How late is too late?

Most of the HIV drugs that are now in use can be taken an hour or two early or late and it will not make any difference to their effectiveness. This is because they are processed by the body quite slowly and the drug stays in the blood for a long time to fight HIV.

But make every effort to take your medicine at the right time. And don't assume that because somebody else is able to take their medication late, even if they are taking the same drugs as you, that you will be able to do the same. The speed and effectiveness with which drugs are processed can vary considerably between people.

You might find it helpful to talk to your doctor about this before you start a new treatment or at a routine appointment. For example, if you usually take your treatment twice a day and you forget to take it in the morning, you could ask your doctor how late is too late to take it. Talking about these things in advance can make it less worrying and help you to plan ways of making sure you remember to take your treatment at the right times.

Medicine to fit your life

HIV treatment is becoming easier to take.

There are even treatments that consist of just one pill, taken once a day.

Many other combinations of anti-HIV drugs now only need to be taken once a day, or twice a day at most, and for some drugs it doesn't matter if they are taken with or without food.

So talk to your doctor about finding a combination of drugs that fits the way you live your life.

If you are finding taking your medicine difficult, ask for help.

Planning ahead

Many people find that they develop a routine that helps them to remember to take their medicine. But even simple things that interrupt this routine can mean that doses are missed or taken late.

If you know that your normal dosing routine may be interrupted, then try and make a plan that helps you take your medicine as close as possible to the correct time.

For example, carry a dose of your medicine with you, and have a bottle of water handy as well as a snack if you need to take your drugs with food.

Some people find an alarm on their watch helpful. Or you could ask somebody who knows that you are taking medication to remind you.

Also, you might want to keep spare doses of medicine at places where you may be when you need to take a dose, such as work, a friend's, in the glove compartment of the car, or in your bag. Remember to keep medicines away from children. Also be aware that some medicines can only be kept at room temperature for a few weeks, and that medicines have use-by dates.