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Side Effects of HIV Medicines

HIV Medicines and Side Effects

Last Reviewed: October 24, 2019

Key Points

- HIV medicines help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives and reduce the risk of [HIV transmission](#). But HIV medicines can sometimes cause side effects. Most side effects from HIV medicines are manageable, but a few can be serious.
- Overall, the benefits of HIV medicines far outweigh the risk of side effects. In addition, newer HIV medicines cause fewer side effects than medicines used in the past. As HIV treatment continues to improve, people are less likely to have side effects from HIV medicines.
- Different HIV medicines can cause different side effects. In addition, people taking the same HIV medicine can have different side effects.
- People starting HIV medicines can talk to their health care provider about possible side effects and ways to manage them.

Can HIV medicines cause side effects?

HIV medicines help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives. HIV medicines also reduce the risk of [HIV transmission](#). But HIV medicines can sometimes cause side effects. Most side effects from HIV medicines are manageable, but a few can be serious.

Overall, the benefits of HIV medicines far outweigh the risk of side effects. In addition, newer HIV medicines cause fewer side effects than medicines used in the past. As HIV treatment continues to improve, people are less likely to have side effects from HIV medicines.

Before starting HIV medicines, people with HIV discuss possible side effects from HIV medicines with their health care providers. They work together to select an [HIV regimen](#) based on the person's individual needs.

Do all HIV medicines cause the same side effects?

Different HIV medicines can cause different side effects. In addition, people taking the same HIV medicine can have different side effects.

Side effects from HIV medicines may last only a few days or weeks. For example, nausea, fatigue, and trouble sleeping are some short-term side effects of HIV medicines.

Other side effects from some HIV medicines can lead to problems that may not appear for months or years after starting a medicine. For example, high [cholesterol](#) can be a side effect of some HIV medicines. High cholesterol is a risk factor for heart disease.

Having another medical condition or taking other medicines can increase the risk of side effects from HIV medicines. [Drug interactions](#) between HIV medicines or with other medicines a person is taking can also cause side effects.

Use the AIDSinfo [Drug Database](#) to learn more about your HIV medicines, including possible side effects. For help using the Drug Database, contact an AIDSinfo health information specialist by phone (1-800-448-0440) or email (ContactUs@aidsinfo.nih.gov).

What are some ways to manage side effects from HIV medicines?

Before starting HIV medicines, talk to your health care provider about possible side effects.

Depending on the HIV medicines in your HIV regimen, your health care provider will:

- Tell you which specific side effects to look out for.
- Give you suggestions on how to deal with side effects that are manageable. For example, to manage nausea and vomiting, eat small meals and avoid spicy foods.
- Tell you about the signs of life-threatening side effects that require immediate medical care. One example is swelling of the mouth and tongue.

Once you start taking HIV medicines, tell your health care provider about any side effect that you are having. Your health care provider can recommend ways to treat or manage the side effect.

In some cases, it may be necessary to change HIV medicines because of a side effect. **However, do NOT cut down on, skip, or stop taking your HIV medicines unless your health care provider tells you to.** Fortunately, there are many HIV medicines available to include in an HIV regimen. The choice of HIV medicines to replace those causing side effects will depend on a person's individual needs.

This fact sheet is based on information from the following sources:

- From the Department of Health and Human Services: Guidelines for the Use of Antiretroviral Agents in Adults and Adolescents with HIV: [Adverse Effects of Antiretroviral Agents](#)
- From the Food and Drug Administration: [HIV and AIDS—Medicines to Help You](#)
- From the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases: [HIV/AIDS Treatment](#)