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HIV Treatment

Following an HIV Regimen: Steps to Take Before and After Starting HIV Medicines

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Key Points

- An essential part of effective HIV treatment is medication adherence. Medication adherence means sticking to an [HIV regimen](#)—taking HIV medicines every day and exactly as prescribed.
- Before starting an HIV regimen, tell your health care provider if you have any issues that might make it hard for you to follow an HIV regimen. For example, people who have difficulty swallowing pills or people who do not have health insurance may find it hard to stick to an HIV regimen.
- After starting an HIV regimen, medication aids such as pill boxes, apps, and medication diaries can help to maintain long-term medication adherence.

Adherence



Benefits of Adherence



Before starting an HIV regimen, talk to your health care provider about medication adherence.

Talking with your health care provider will help you understand why you're starting HIV treatment and why medication adherence is important. Medication adherence means sticking to an [HIV regimen](#)—taking HIV medicines every day and exactly as prescribed.

Treatment with HIV medicines (called [antiretroviral therapy or ART](#)) is recommended for everyone with HIV. HIV medicines help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives. Adherence to an HIV regimen reduces the risk of [drug resistance](#) and [HIV transmission](#).

What should I tell my health care provider before starting an HIV regimen?

Tell your health care provider about other prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, nutritional supplements, and herbal products you are taking or plan to take. Other medicines or products you take may interact with HIV medicines. A [drug interaction](#) may affect how an HIV medicine works or cause side effects. To learn more, read the *AIDSinfo* [What is a Drug Interaction?](#) fact sheet.

Tell your health care provider about any issues that might make adherence difficult. For example, people who have difficulty swallowing pills or people who do not have health insurance may find it hard to stick to an HIV regimen.

Describe your daily schedule to your health care provider. You and your health care provider can work together to design an HIV medication schedule that fits in with your day-to-day routine.

Ask your health care provider for written instructions on how to follow your HIV regimen. The instructions should include the following details:

- How much of each medicine to take
- When to take each medicine
- How to take each medicine (for example, with or without food)

Use a variety of strategies to stick to your HIV regimen.

To maintain adherence, try some of the following strategies:

- Use a 7-day pill box. Once a week, fill the pill box with your HIV medicines for the entire week.
- Take your HIV medicines at the same time every day.
- Set an alarm on your cell phone to remind you to take your medicines. You can also download the [AIDSinfo Drug Database app](#) to bookmark your HIV medicines, make notes, and set daily pill reminders.
- Ask a family member or friend to remind you to take your medicines.
- Plan ahead for changes in your daily routine, including weekends and holidays. If you're going away, pack enough medicine to last the entire trip.
- Use an app or an online or paper medicine diary to record each medicine as you take it. Reviewing your diary will help you identify the times that you're most likely to forget to take your medicines.
- Keep all of your medical appointments. Be sure to refill your prescriptions before you run out of HIV medicines.

What should I do if I forget to take my HIV medicines?

Unless your health care provider tells you otherwise, take the medicine you missed as soon as you realize you skipped it. But if it's almost time for the next dose, don't take the missed dose; just take your next dose at the usual time. Don't take a double dose of a medicine to make up for a missed dose.

Discuss medication adherence at each appointment with your health care provider.

Tell your health care provider if you're having difficulty following your regimen. Don't forget to mention any side effects you're having. Side effects from HIV medicines (or from other medicines that you are taking) can interfere with medication adherence.

Let your health care provider know if your regimen is too complicated to follow. Your health care provider may recommend that you switch to a simpler HIV regimen.

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: [Adherence to the Continuum of Care](#)

From the Health Resources and Services Administration:

- [Guide for HIV/AIDS Clinical Care: HIV Treatment/Adherence](#)

From HIV.gov:

- [Tips on Taking Your HIV Medication Every Day](#)

From the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs:

- [Questions to Ask Your Health Care Provider About HIV Drugs](#)