

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

Fast Facts:

- HIV is treated with medicines called, “antiretrovirals.” They must be taken every day at about the same time so that they don’t stop working.
- Keeping the amount of HIV in your blood very low (called “undetectable”) will help you live a long life and lowers the risk of giving the virus to someone else.

What are HIV and AIDS?

- HIV stands for “Human Immunodeficiency Virus”
 - Human (only in people)
 - Immunodeficiency (when your body’s system that fights diseases is weak)
 - Virus (a cell that gets into your body and causes you to be sick)
- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS
- AIDS stands for “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome”
 - Acquired (you get it from something outside of you)
 - Immune Deficiency (when your body’s system that fights diseases is weak)
 - Syndrome (a group of health problems that is the sickness)

What are the GOALS of treating HIV?

- To keep the HIV viral load “undetectable” which means the machine that measures it can’t see it because it is so low. The HIV viral load is the amount of HIV in your blood. When it is so low, it keeps you healthy and lowers the risk of giving someone else the virus.
- To have more than 200 CD4 cells or get them back to normal which is more than 350 CD4 cells. The CD4 cells (also called T cells or T helper cells) are a big part of your body’s system that fights diseases.
- To make sure you don’t have other problems from HIV like getting other diseases or having lots of yeast infections in the mouth or vagina or getting sick a lot.

How is HIV treated?

- HIV is treated by taking medicines called “antiretrovirals” or “ARVs” at about the same time(s) EVERY DAY.
- The medicines fight HIV so that it stops attacking the CD4 cells. This happens fast after starting the medicines.

Why is it so important NOT to miss a dose of HIV medications?

- The virus can change so that the HIV medications don’t work anymore; we call this, “resistance.” Missing doses can make it so there isn’t enough medicine in the body to fight the HIV and gives the HIV a chance to learn how to block your medicines from working.

What if I run out of medicine?

- Think of your HIV medications as a group - they all need to be together. If you don’t have one of the medications for the day, then don’t take any of them.
- Not taking all of the medicines can cause the virus to block them from working.
- Be sure you call for refills when you have *at least* 7 – 14 days of all of your HIV medicine left.
- If you don’t get your medicine when you expect to, call the pharmacy right away and ask when you will get them - be sure to tell them if you are going to run out of any of your HIV medicines!!

Can HIV medicines be taken with other medicine, herbs, or supplements?

- Most HIV medicines have a HIGH RISK for problems with other medicines, herbs, or supplements.
- Always ask your HIV clinic and/or pharmacist before starting a new product, even if another clinic or person wants you to take it.

Points to Remember:

- Taking HIV medicine EVERY DAY will help you stay healthy and lower the risk of giving the virus to someone else.
- If you miss HIV medicine doses, tell your HIV Clinic and pharmacist about why. They can help you find a way to take them or find HIV medicines that work for you.
- Call the pharmacy if you have only 7-14 days of doses left or if you don't know when your next refill will be there.
- Please let your HIV Clinic and pharmacist know before you start a new product to make sure it won't be a problem with your HIV medicines.

For Additional Information:

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention – <http://www.cdc.gov/std/hiv/default.htm>
- The Body – www.thebody.com
- Cascade AIDS Project (for Oregon) – www.cascadeaids.org
- Positively Aware – <http://positivelyaware.com>