

How to Thrive with HIV


Created by people living with HIV



Equitas Health
Care for All

What is HIV?

- HIV is a virus that attacks a person's immune system—the part of the body that protects us from infection and illness.
- If left untreated, slowly over time, there is more and more virus in the body. This weakens the immune system and can lead to AIDS.
- Not everyone that has HIV has AIDS. AIDS means your immune system is weakened enough that you are at high risk for infections and complications.



“Even though I have HIV, I am healthy and in a great relationship.”

How is HIV Spread

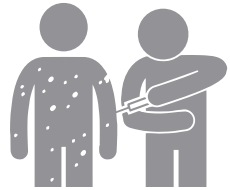
You CAN get HIV from...



Sex without
a condom



passed from
mother to baby



Sharing injection
equipment

You CAN'T get HIV from...



kissing



hugging



Sharing food



insect bites



toilet seats



bathing



sneezes & coughs



sweat

Coping with Your Diagnosis

- HIV is a life-long health condition that you can manage with medicine and help from your care team, family, and friends.
- Accepting an HIV diagnosis can be a very difficult.
- Anyone can be at risk for HIV. It depends on your risk factors like sharing needles, not using a condom, or not being on PrEP.
- It can be hard to determine when you got HIV.
- It's important to remember this is not something you deserve or that you caused. It does not define who you are.



SELF ADVOCACY | *Your Voice Matters*

You are your biggest advocate! Remember it is ok to ask questions, and ask for a second opinion. You stay healthiest when you have a good relationship with your medical team and when you understand and commit to your treatment plan

HIV Treatment: The Basics

- There is no cure for HIV, but you can stay healthy with medication(s) called **anti-retroviral therapy (ART)**.
- The goal of treating HIV is to lower the amount of virus in your body to an **“undetectable”** level. This means the virus cannot be seen in your blood with a lab test. It does **NOT** mean you no longer have HIV.
- An undetectable viral load lets your body rebuild your immune system, keeping you healthy.
- When you have an undetectable viral load, you cannot give the virus to sexual partners.
- It is recommended that you start treatment for HIV as soon as possible, because the sooner you start, the sooner you can reduce the virus’s impact on your body.



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Talk with your doctor or nurse before starting anti-retroviral therapy. It’s important to be ready before treatment begins. Take the time you need to feel ready to begin treatment.

HIV Treatment: The Details

- In many cases HIV is treated with one pill taken once a day.
- Taking HIV medication(s) is a long-term commitment. Once you start medication(s), you will need to take them every day for the rest of your life.
- If you frequently miss doses of your medication(s), viral resistance can develop. This means that the medication(s) no longer work, called drug resistance, and may lead to AIDS.
- Talk openly with your provider to make sure you start the medicine that is right for you. Discuss your routine, eating habits, other medication(s) and supplements you take, drug and alcohol use, and concerns about medication(s).

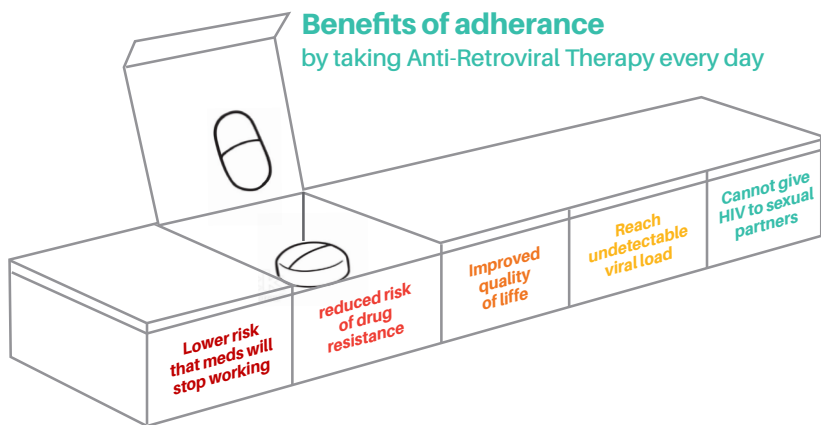


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If you're not comfortable with your provider, it's ok to see someone else. If they are using terms you don't know or that make you uncomfortable, tell them.

Taking your medication every day is critical. Here are some strategies you can use:

- Use a pill box to manage daily doses.
- Set an alarm or use an app on your phone.
- Keep a small stash of pills with you in case you forget or don't sleep at your house.
- Take your pill(s) at a time you already do something daily - like tooth brushing or making coffee.



Medication Side Effects

- Like all medicine, anti-retroviral therapy can have side effects. Most side effects go away within a few weeks to a month after you begin treatment.
- Anti-retroviral therapy often interacts with other medication(s). Your doctor or nurse must know all the prescriptions, supplements, and over-the-counter medication(s) (like Tylenol) you take, even if you don't take them every day.

Short-Term Side Effects of HIV Medication(s)



Feeling Tired



Nausea & Vomiting



Diarrhea



Headache



Fever



Muscle Pain



Occasional Dizziness



Insomnia



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If you don't like your medication there might be other options. The most important thing is that you talk to your doctor or nurse.

HIV Care

- Being engaged in HIV care involves more than just taking your medication(s). You will need to see your medical provider regularly. Be sure to reschedule if you have to miss an appointment.
- At your medical appointment, you will get your blood drawn to ensure the anti-retroviral therapy is still working and the medication is not hurting you.
- You need to get all your vaccinations updated. Even healthy people living with HIV are at risk for infections and complications from infections like the flu and pneumonia. Getting all of your vaccinations is important to your health.



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If you have questions about your health, your blood test, or medication(s) make sure to ask. If something doesn't make sense, ask for more information. It's important for your health that you actively engage in your care.

Having a Baby

- A person living with HIV can give birth to a child that does not have HIV.
- Most babies in the US born to a parent living with HIV do not get HIV. People who are pregnant will need to take medication(s) every day during their pregnancy and will need specialized care.
- If you are thinking of becoming pregnant, make sure to tell your doctor or nurse. This will impact what anti-retroviral therapy you take.
- If you are a person living with HIV, getting an undetectable viral load protects your partner and your child from getting HIV.



SELF ADVOCACY | *Your Voice Matters*

There are lots of options for having a healthy baby if you are living with HIV. Talk with your care team. Bring your partner to visits if that is helpful in deciding what is right for you.

Eating Healthy

- Eating a well-balanced diet is an important part of staying healthy. There is no special HIV diet to follow.
- There is a lot of information on eating healthy, and it can be overwhelming to sort through.

Below are some tips for eating healthy:

- Cook for yourself as often as possible.
- Stop eating fast food.
- Avoid fried foods.
- Eat more fruits and veggies. Canned and frozen are fine. Rinse canned items and avoid canned fruit with syrup in it.
- Eat lean meats like chicken and fish.
- Make healthier choices when you eat out – grilled chicken instead of fried, salad instead of fries, etc.
- Avoid processed foods like cookies and potato chips. If you do eat them, eat small amounts.
- Drink water and avoid sugary drinks like soda (pop) and fruit juice.

Exercise

- Exercise is one of the best things you can do to improve your health. Good for both your physical and mental health, exercise gives you energy and helps you sleep.
- Starting an exercise program can be scary. Here are some tips that help clients get started:
 - Set realistic goals – start with 20 minutes of exercise three times a week.
 - You are more likely to exercise if you enjoy it. Make it fun! Do it with friends.
 - The internet has a ton of free exercise videos from Ab work-outs to Zumba. Find some you like.
 - Aim to exercise at the start of day. This lowers the change you skip a workout.

Smoking

- If you smoke, quitting smoking is the #1 thing you can do to improve your health.
- You don't have to do it alone. Ask your provider about resources to help you quit.



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If you have questions about diet or exercise, make sure you talk to your medical provider. They can help you develop a plan to be successful and help you avoid fad diets and exercises that may hurt you.



Definitions

Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS): When HIV is untreated, it causes AIDS. AIDS is the last stage of the HIV infection.

You get AIDS after HIV has greatly damaged your immune system.

You may be diagnosed with AIDS if you have certain types of infections, or when you have a low CD4 cell count (less than 200 cell/mm).

Acute HIV: The early stage of HIV Infection, usually the first two to four weeks after a person is infected. Some people have flu-like symptoms.

During acute HIV infection an HIV test may be negative.

Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART): The medication(s) used to treat HIV.

Case Manager: The person on your care team that will help you connect to non-medical support and resources, like the Ryan White Program, Medicaid or other health insurance, housing, and food.

Care Team: People who support you to reach your health goals.

Your Care Team may include a case manager, therapist, dentist, medical provider, someone inside or outside Equitas Health, or friends and family.

CD4 Count: “CD4 count” refers to how many CD4 cells are currently in your body. In a lab test, CD4 count is checked by a blood draw.

CD4 count is monitored regularly as part of HIV care. Your CD4 count lets your provider know the health of your immune system. A high CD4 count indicates a healthy immune system. When the CD4 count of a patient with HIV falls below a certain level, they may be diagnosed with AIDS.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): HIV is a virus that affects your immune system—the part of your body that protects you from infection and illness. It uses the cells of your immune system (specifically a type of cell called a “CD4 cell”) to make copies of itself. There is currently no cure for HIV, but it can be treated with medication(s). There are two types of HIV, HIV-1 and HIV-2. Most people with HIV in the United States have HIV-1.

Immune System: The body’s defense system against infections and other invaders.

Medical Provider: The person on your care team that will help you manage your medical care. It can be either a doctor or a nurse practitioner.

OI Prophylaxis: Medication(s) taken to prevent certain opportunistic infections from happening.

Opportunistic Infections (OI): Infections that happen in people with weakened immune systems. Examples include thrush, shingles, and pneumonia.

Ryan White CARE Act Program: A federal program that provides help with cost of medication(s) and doctor's visits for people living with HIV. Can also assist with housing and other needs.

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI): Infections spread through sex. Includes gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, herpes, and others.

T-Helper Cell/CD4 Cell: A CD4 cell is a type of "T helper" cell, a white blood cell that's a part of your immune system. White blood cells help your body fight infections. CD4 cells are the primary cell that HIV attacks.

Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U): When a person living with HIV has an undetectable viral load they cannot transmit the virus to a sexual partner. This is also called Treatment as Prevention (TAP), because when we treat HIV, we make it harder for the virus to spread within our communities.

Undetectable Viral Load: When you take ART medication(s), your viral load can become "undetectable," which means that you have lowered the level of HIV in your blood so that it cannot be detected by a standard lab test. Having an undetectable viral load does not mean your HIV is cured, but it does mean that the virus is not able to harm your immune system. Having an undetectable viral load also means you cannot pass the virus to a sexual partner.

Vaccinations: Medication(s), usually shots, that help protect your body from serious illness, like pneumonia and the flu.

Viral Load: "Viral load" refers to how much of the HIV virus is in your body. In a lab test, viral load is checked by a blood draw.

Viral Resistance: When the medication(s) used to treat HIV stop working because HIV has learned how to work around the medicines. You can lower the risk of viral resistance by taking your medication(s) every day.



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**RYAN WHITE
HIV/AIDS
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PART B**