

FACTSHEET #6: HIV TREATMENT ADHERENCE

YOUR KEY MESSAGE:

“Adherence to HIV treatment helps to keep HIV in check over the long term. Adherence means taking your HIV treatment as directed by your doctor - every day, on time, every time.”

WHY IS ADHERENCE IMPORTANT?

Taking your HIV drugs every day at the same time is critical to keeping HIV in check in the long term.

The currently available treatment doesn't cure HIV. It reduces the amount of virus in your body so that HIV doesn't make you sick.

You need to keep the level of HIV drugs in your bloodstream high enough by taking your treatment every day, on time, every time.

Not taking your HIV treatment properly can mean the levels of HIV drugs in your blood reduce and then HIV can develop *resistance* to the combination you are taking.

Resistance means the HIV drug combination you take has stopped working properly against HIV.

COMMON REASONS THAT WE FORGET

Simply forgetting: most people with HIV report that they simply forget to take their treatment without a reason why.

Routine change: this includes travel for holidays or work, shift work, a sudden crisis like a death in the family, losing your job, divorce or separation.

Worrying that people will find out: taking medications in places where people don't know you have HIV can make it hard to comply.

Feeling sad or depressed: depression or sadness is reported reason that people with HIV forget or even stop taking their HIV drugs.

Drug side effects or other sickness: experiencing side effects to an HIV drug combination can make people with HIV reluctant to keep taking it.

Stock outs: when the hospital or clinic you attend runs out of HIV drugs.

TOOLS TO ENCOURAGE ADHERENCE

There are simple things you can do to remember to take your HIV treatment and to plan for when you are most likely to forget to take your treatment.

SIMPLY FORGETTING

Link taking your HIV drugs to something else you do each day – brushing your teeth, , breakfast in the morning, a hot drink before bed.

Use technology – set alerts using your computer or your mobile phone.

Use notes – notes on doors, walls or mirrors can help you remember.

ROUTINE CHANGE

Use pillboxes - can help to both remember that you have to take your HIV drugs and to track when you've forgotten in a week or a month. Pillboxes can be purchased from clinics, pharmacies and hospital pharmacies.

Use technology – set alerts using your computer or your mobile phone.

Be self-aware – knowing which routine changes make you forget means you can plan by using technology, pillboxes or calling on partners, friends or family to help you remember.

WORRYING THAT PEOPLE WILL FIND OUT

Disguise your pillboxes – keep your treatment in your glasses case, pencil case, purse or wallet.

Go to the bathroom – take your HIV drugs in the toilet or bathroom at work or home.

Have a story – tell people who ask that you are taking vitamins or have another illness like diabetes or high blood pressure.

FEELING SAD OR DEPRESSED

Get help from your doctor, your caseworker, your friends, partner or family.

DRUG SIDE EFFECTS AND ILLNESS

Buy antiemetics (to stop nausea and vomiting), anti-diarrheals (to stop diarrhea) and paracetamol (to stop headaches and fevers) the day you get your first ART combination. Keep these medications with you all the time during the induction period for six to twelve weeks. Use them as recommended. If side effects persist talk to your treating doctor.

Serious side effects should be reported immediately to your treating doctor.

Getting a cold or the flu can make you not able to or feel that you don't want to take your treatment. In the case of a serious illness, like food poisoning, you should involve your treating doctor if possible.

STOCK OUTS

If your hospital or clinic stocks out of HIV drugs it may be possible to arrange to get your treatment from a different service provider. Talk to your treatment doctor about the options available.

GETTING A NEW PRESCRIPTION

Some people with HIV forget to get a new prescription in time and then run out of their HIV treatment drugs.

Use a diary – note in your diary a month in advance the date that your treatment will run out. Make an appointment at the clinic or hospital well in advance.

IF YOU FORGET

We recommend you aim for 100% adherence to your HIV treatment. But where this isn't possible here are some suggestions if you forget.

TAKE YOUR HIV DRUGS AS NORMAL

If you remember within a few hours of the time you should have taken your HIV drugs then it is ok to simply take them when you remember. After this, just return to your normal HIV drug timing.

DON'T DOUBLE DOSE

If you forget, don't double up on your treatment at the next dosing time. Just take the normal amount of HIV drugs as directed by your doctor. Doubling up can make you sick.

Don't let your supply of medication run out. Watch your supply and don't wait until your last minute for getting new supplies.

GROUP DISCUSSION ON THE QUESTION

When are you most likely to forget to take your treatment?