

A stethoscope with a silver chest piece and black tubing is positioned over a light blue surface. Scattered around the stethoscope are numerous white, cylindrical capsules. The background is a soft, light blue gradient.

ANTI-RETROVIRAL THERAPY (ART)

WHAT IS TREATMENT *adherence?*


Treatment adherence means following your treatment regimen - taking the correct dose of each anti-retroviral therapy (ARV) medication at the correct time and exactly as prescribed.

WHY IS *adherence* IMPORTANT?

Adherence affects the success of HIV treatment in three ways:

- 1** Good adherence to an HIV treatment regimen helps the ARV medications work to reduce the amount of HIV virus in the body (viral load). Skipping medication, even occasionally, gives HIV virus the chance to multiply rapidly. Preventing the virus from multiplying is the best way to stay healthy.
- 2** Good adherence to an HIV treatment regimen also helps prevent drug resistance. Drug resistance develops when the virus mutates (change form), becoming “resistant” to certain ARV medications. One or more ARV medication in a treatment regimen can become ineffective as a result of drug resistance.
- 3** If you have a good treatment adherence you cannot transmit HIV to your sexual partner and your baby during pregnancy, child-birth and breast feeding.

Skipping medications makes it easier for drug resistance to develop. HIV virus can develop resistance to the ARV in a person’s current regimen or to other, similar ARV medication not yet taken, limiting options for successful HIV treatment. Drug resistant strains of HIV can be transmitted to others too. Although there are many ARV medications and treatment regimens, studies show that a person’s first regimen offers the best chance for long term treatment success. Adhering to your treatment regimen from the start will help ensure your HIV treatment is successful.



In simple terms, drug resistance refers to the ability of disease-causing germs, bacteria or virus, to continue multiplying despite the presence of drugs that usually weaken or kill them.



WHY IS TREATMENT *adherence* SOMETIME DIFFICULT?

There are several reasons why adhering to an HIV treatment regimen can be difficult. Most treatment regimens involve taking several pills every day - with or without food, or before or after other medications.

Other factors that can make treatment adherence difficult include:

Difficulty taking medications (such as trouble swallowing pills)· Side effects from medications (for example, fatigue or diarrhea)

Alcohol or drug abuse.

Daily schedule issues (including a busy schedule, shift work, or travel away from home)· Being sick or depressed

In children, if treatment not taken properly or not adjusted to their growing body weights, as they grow and develop

WHAT CAN I DO TO *adhere* TO MY HIV TREATMENT REGIMEN?

Before you start treatment, be certain you are committed to taking ARV medications everyday as directed. Talk to your doctor about any issues that may make adherence difficult.

- Possible side effects from the ARV medications
- Discuss other medications you are taking for other illnesses
- Seek Peer to Peer support with other people living with HIV
- Personal issues such as depression or alcohol or drug abuse
- Clinical support (providing bus fare to & fro) to collect medication is provided by clinic staff. Ask your clinic nurse or doctor for further information regarding this assistance.
- Understanding issues that can make adherence difficult will help you and your doctor select the best regimen for you. You may find adhering to an ARV medication become difficult over time so talk to your doctor/peer about adherence at every visit.





HOW CAN I MAINTAIN *adherence* AFTER I START TREATMENT?

You may want to consider one of the following strategies to help you adhere to your ARV regimen:

Use a 7 day pill box. Once a week, fill the pill box with your medications for the entire week

Take your medication at the same time every day

Enlist your family members, friends, or coworkers to remind you to take your medications

Plan ahead for in your daily routine including weekends and holidays. If you are going away, pack enough medications to last the entire trip.

Use a timer, an alarm clock, or your cell phone alarm to remind you to take your medications

Identify another person living with HIV to be your buddy in this process

Keep your medication nearby. Keep a backup supply of medications in your bag or desk at the office.

Put a reminder near your bed or in a place you will see every day

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE PROBLEMS *adhering* TO MY TREATMENT REGIMEN?

Talk to your doctor about the difficulty you face following the regimen. Together you can identify the reasons you are skipping medication. Tell the doctor about any side effects from the medications in your regimen. Side effects are a major reason treatment adherence can be difficult. Based on the reasons you are having problems adhering to the treatment regimen, the doctor may adjust or change your regimen.

WHAT *causes* TREATMENT TO FAIL?

HIV treatment can fail if an ARV medication is unable to control the virus or protect the health of the immune system. Sometimes treatment fails because of things you can't control, such as unmanageable side effects from ARV medications, interactions between ARV medications and other medications you take, or the body's poor absorption of ARV medications. It may be necessary to change medications to deal with these problems. There are new HIV medications which have less side effects and a now available—ask your doctor about these medications.



Poor treatment adherence is another reason HIV treatment can fail. Skipping medication allows HIV to multiply, increasing your viral load. To achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load, it's important to closely follow your treatment regimen. Poor treatment adherence can also lead to drug resistance, which can cause treatment to fail. Skipping medications gives HIV a chance to change form and become resistant to (not affected by) the medications in your regimen. Sometimes working with your doctor to improve adherence can prevent treatment failure. Your doctor can give you tips on how to manage medication side effects that make adherence difficult. Or the doctor can simplify your regimen to make your medication schedule fit your busy lifestyle.

Poor treatment adherence is another reason HIV treatment can fail. Skipping medication allows HIV to multiply, increasing your viral load.

HOW CAN I PREPARE FOR *adherence* BEFORE I START HIV?

Being prepared to take HIV medications every day is a first step to treatment success. Planning ahead will help you adhere to your treatment regimen when you start treatment. Begin by talking to your doctor. Make sure you understand why you are starting HIV treatment and why treatment adherence is important. Discuss these important details about your treatment regimen:

- Each anti-HIV medication in your regimen
- The dose of each medication
- How many pills in each dose
- When to take each medication · How to take each medication with or without food
- Possible side effects from each medication, including serious side effects
- Possible interactions between the HIV medications in your regimen and other medications you take
- How to store your medication
- Other medications that you are taking for other health conditions. Discuss drug interactions

Tell your doctor if you have any personal issues such as depression or alcohol or drug abuse that can make adherence difficult. If needed your doctor may refer you to service providers who can help you to address these issues before you start treatment.

It is important to start medication as soon as possible after you are diagnosed - new medications have few side effects. Ask your doctor to prescribe them.

Clinic contact details			
Country	Name of Clinic	Physical Location	Phone Contact
Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	Pohnpei State Hospital Chuuk State Hospital Kosrae State Hospital Yap State Memorial Hospital	Pohnpei State Chuuk State Kosrae State Yap State	N/A
Kiribati	HIV Unit, MHMS	Bikenibeu, Iakun Melad	75228874
Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)	STI Clinic	Room 57, (Old Surgical Ward)	(692) 4550132 (692) 4552538 (692) 4552150
Samoa	Communicable Disease Clinic	Moto'otua	685 – 66700
Tonga	Communicable Disease Clinic, Public Health	Vaiola Hospital, Tofoa, Nukualofa	23200 ext: 1344
Republic of Nauru	HIV/STI Unit	Naoero Public Health Center	(674) 557 3930 (674) 558 4898
Niue	Niue Fooo Hospital	Kaimiti, Alofi	(683) 4100
Cook Islands	Rarotonga Hospital	Rarotonga	(682) 22664
Palau	Communicable Disease Unit (CDU) Clinic	Meyuns, Koror	680-488-2450/3117
	Health Information Resource Center	Medal'ai, Koror	680-488-1757/6500
Tuvalu	Princess Margaret Hospital	Fakaifou Side Funafuti	(688) 20480
Vanuatu	Norsup Hospital, ANC Lamap HC Liro HC Utas HC Nebul HC	Malampa Province	N/A
	NPH ANC Tasmalum HC Tassiriki HC Avunatarie HC Fanafo HC	Sanma Province	N/A
	Sola HC	Torba Province	N/A
	Lenakel hospital ANC	Tafea Province	N/A
	VCH ANC	Shefa Province	N/A

This product was supported by FJN+ and UNDP through the Multi-Country Western Pacific Integrated HIV/TB Programme.

For more information, please visit your nearest health center and/or HUB clinic.



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.