



Drug Information

Starting Anti-HIV Medications

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If you have HIV, starting anti-HIV medications is a big decision.

It is difficult to decide when to start taking the medications. Usually you have to continue the medications for life once you start them, and they have good and bad effects. It is important to talk with your doctor, pharmacist and other people living with HIV/AIDS who are taking medications before you make a decision about starting them. Don't rush into starting the medications. Take the time you need to consider all your questions before making your decision. However, you should understand that waiting too long before starting anti-HIV medications may put your health at risk.

Some of the good things about taking anti-HIV medications:

- They can help you stay healthy longer or get your health back
- They may help you live longer
- They can keep your immune system healthy, reducing your chance of getting AIDS related illnesses
- They can help reduce the damage to your immune system by the HIV virus

Some of the bad things about taking anti-HIV medications:

- You have to take a number of pills every day, usually at about the same times
- They have side effects that can be unpleasant or even harmful
- You may have to change your eating and drinking habits
- Others may find out you have HIV from your medications
- Some anti-HIV medications and other drugs, herbs or food do not mix well together

Think about these questions before you choose your HIV medications:

- Do you have a place to live?
- Do the people you live with know you have HIV?
- Do you have a refrigerator where you live?
- If you work, do the people you work with know you have HIV?
- Do you work the same hours every work day or do you have changing shifts?
- Can you store things in a refrigerator at your workplace?
- Can you get to a bathroom easily at your workplace?
- Do you spend most of your time living in one city?
- Can you swallow pills without difficulty?
- Have you taken anti-HIV medications before?
- Have you taken other medications on a regular basis before?
- Do you usually sleep and wake up around the same time everyday?



- Do you usually eat everyday?
- Do you have any special diet or food needs?
- Do you think you can drink 8-12 glasses of water everyday?

Deciding on a combination that will best suit your needs:

- It is very important to take all the medications the way they are prescribed and at regular times. So choosing which combination of medications to take is very important.
- If any of your answers to the above questions is “NO”, it may mean you would have some difficulty taking some of the anti-HIV medications.
- When you talk to your physician about which anti-HIV medications to take, your answers can help your physician design a combination that will suit your situation better so that you can stick to the treatment easier.

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