

## When to start taking HIV medicine - HIV medicines, part 2



Treatment with HIV medicines called antiretroviral therapy or ART helps people with HIV to live longer, healthier lives. ART also reduces the risk of spreading HIV.

**Everyone** infected with HIV should start ART as soon as possible. For people with certain conditions it is especially important to start ART immediately:

### Pregnancy

All pregnant women with HIV should start ART medicines to prevent the mother from passing HIV to her baby. HIV medicines will also protect the health of the pregnant woman.

### AIDS

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or AIDS is the most advanced stage of HIV infection. People with AIDS should start ART immediately.



### HIV-related illnesses

Some illnesses that develop in people infected with HIV increase the need for ART. These illnesses include opportunistic infections or OIs. OIs are infections that develop more often or are more severe in people with weakened immune systems, such as people with HIV.

### Early HIV infection

During early HIV infection, the amount of virus in the body, called viral load, is very high. A high viral load damages the immune system and increases the risk of spreading HIV. For these reasons, people with early HIV infection should consider starting ART right away.



Once you do begin treatment, it's important to continue regular visits with your healthcare provider, and to follow the directions for the medicines very carefully. If you don't take your HIV medications **exactly** as directed, you could develop drug resistance. Drug resistance means your HIV medicines stop working.

Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about HIV/AIDS. Your public health department, health care provider, and public library can help.

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