

Drug adherence - HIV medicines, part 5



HIV treatment, called antiretroviral therapy or ART, is a combination of HIV medicines, called an HIV regimen. Medication adherence means sticking firmly to an HIV regimen. It means taking HIV medicines every day and exactly as prescribed.

HIV medicines help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives. HIV medicines also reduce the risk of spreading HIV.

Poor adherence to HIV medicines allows the virus to multiply and destroy the immune system. A damaged immune system makes it hard for the body to fight off infections and certain cancers. Poor adherence also increases the risk of drug resistance when HIV medicines quit working. This causes HIV treatment failure.

Taking HIV medicines every day prevents the virus from multiplying. This reduces the risk that HIV will change and produce a drug-resistant strain of HIV.

The following things can make medication adherence difficult:

- Side effects from HIV medicines
- Trouble swallowing pills or other difficulty taking medicines
- A busy schedule, shift work, or travel that makes it hard to take medicines on time
- Illness or depression
- Alcohol or substance abuse that interferes with daily life
- Lack of support from family and friends. This can happen if they don't know your HIV status.
- Lack of health insurance to cover the cost of HIV medicines



Before starting HIV medicines, it helps to have plans in place to take medicines every day, exactly as prescribed. For example, people can use a 7-day pill box or their phone to set daily pill reminders. People can work with their health care providers to choose an HIV regimen that works best for their needs and lifestyle.

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.