

Following an HIV Treatment Regimen

How can I prepare for adherence before I start HIV treatment?

Preparing for adherence before you start taking anti-HIV medications is the first step to treatment success. Planning ahead will help you follow your treatment **regimen** once you start treatment.

Begin by talking to your health care provider. Make sure you understand why you're 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 (amount) of each anti-HIV medication in your regimen.
- 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
- How to store your medications

Talk to your health care provider about other medications you take and their possible side effects. Your health care provider will tell you about potential interactions between the anti-HIV medications in your regimen and the other medications you take.

Tell your health care provider if you have any personal issues, such as depression or alcohol or drug abuse, that can make adherence difficult. If needed, your health care provider can recommend resources to help you address these issues before you start treatment.

How can I maintain adherence after I start treatment?

Consider one or more of the following strategies to help you adhere to your regimen:

- Use a 7-day pill box. Once a week, fill the pill box with your medications for the entire week.
- Take your medications at the same time every day.
- Use a timer, an alarm clock, or your cell phone alarm to remind you to take your medications.
- Ask your family members, friends, or coworkers to remind you to take your medications.
- Keep your medications nearby. Keep a backup supply of

medications at work or in your purse or briefcase.

- Plan ahead for changes in your daily routine, including weekends and holidays. If you're going away, pack enough medications to last the entire trip.
- Use a medication diary to stay on track. Write down the name of each medication; include the dose, number of pills to take, and when to take them. Check off each medication as you take it. Reviewing your diary will help you identify the times you're most likely to skip medications.
- Keep all your medical appointments. Write down the date and time of health care provider visits on your calendar or daily schedule. If you run low on medications before your next visit, call your health care provider to renew your prescriptions.
- Get additional tips on adherence by joining a support group for people living with HIV.

What should I do if I forget to take my medications?

Unless your health care provider tells you otherwise, take a medication you missed as soon as you realize you skipped it. But if it's almost time for the next dose of the medication, don't take the missed dose and just continue on your regular medication schedule. Don't take a double dose of a medication to make up for a missed dose.

What should I do if I have problems adhering to my treatment regimen?

Tell your health care provider that you're having difficulty following your regimen. Together you can identify the reasons why you're skipping medications.

Tell your health care provider about any side effects from the medications in your regimen. Side effects are a major reason treatment adherence can be difficult. A regimen that involves taking many pills at many times during the day can also make adherence difficult.

Terms Used in This Fact Sheet:

Regimen: A combination of three or more anti-HIV medications from at least two different drug classes.

Treatment adherence: Closely following an HIV treatment regimen—taking the correct dose of each anti-HIV medication at the correct time and exactly as prescribed.

Based on why you're having problems with adherence, your health care provider may adjust or change your regimen. (See the [Changing an HIV Treatment Regimen](#) fact sheet.)

For more information:

Contact an *AIDSinfo* health information specialist at 1-800-448-0440 or visit <http://aidsinfo.nih.gov>. See your health care provider for medical advice.