

Treatment on track

Stay strong on HIV treatment for life



Fighting disease

Diseases like TB, flu, malaria, AIDS and others are caused by germs: bacteria, viruses, fungi and protozoa. These germs are your body's enemies and can make you sick.

The **immune system** defends the body against invading germs. It is a network of cells and tissues that are always on the lookout for germs. When it spots a germ, it sends blood cells to fight it.

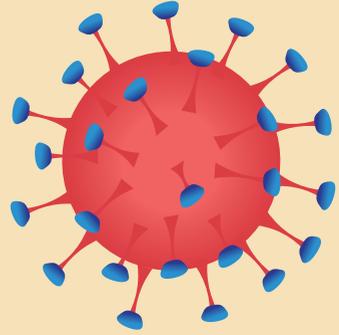
CD4 cells are white blood cells – also called helper T cells – that are like the “soldiers” of your body and they fight against the enemies of your health, the diseases.



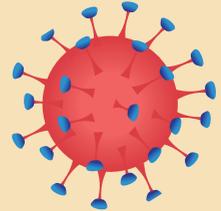
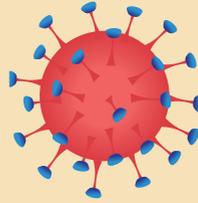
HIV & the immune system

Human Immunodeficiency

Virus (HIV) is a virus that enters your body and causes the disease called AIDS – Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome.



This virus is clever: it makes more and more of itself when it enters your body (this process is called **replication**)



and then attacks your CD4 cells, weakening the immune system.

A **CD4 count** is a test which measures how strong the immune system is – how many of your body's soldiers (CD4 cells) are in your blood. This test helps doctors know how best to help you.

Treatment for HIV

Antiretroviral medicines (ARVs) are used to treat HIV. They work by slowing the replication of HIV cells and protecting your body's CD4 cells. The earlier you start treatment, the smaller the chance that you will get sick.

When HIV attacks your CD4 cells, other diseases can easily enter your body and make you sick. These are called **opportunistic infections**. The lower your CD4 count, the higher your risk of getting one of these infections.

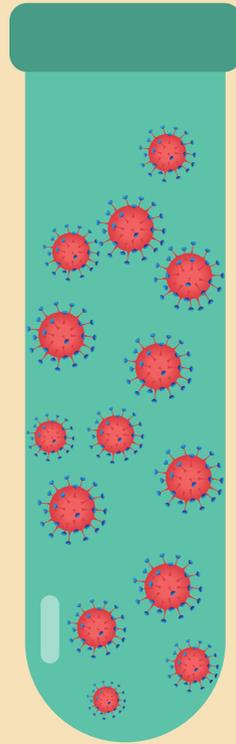


Don't wait to start treatment.

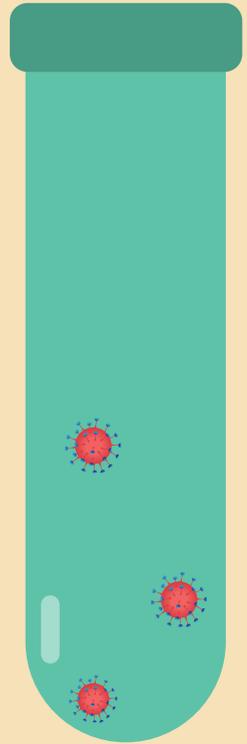
No matter what your CD4 cell count is, you can **go on to treatment immediately** if you test positive for HIV.

Waiting to start ARVs when you are already sick means more chance of getting very sick – and even dying. It also means you can easily pass HIV on to others.

Evidence shows that starting ARVs as soon as possible is the best way of managing HIV.



*detectable
viral load*



*undetectable
viral load*

Undetectable = Untransmittable

How ARVs can help you

When ARVs stop the HIV making more of itself in your body, your CD4 cells will grow and **make your immune system strong again** to fight off diseases.

ARVs reduce the amount of the HIV in your blood – called **viral load**. If you take your ARVs correctly, the amount of HIV in your blood can go down to almost nothing. This is called **viral suppression** and it means you can't pass HIV on to others.

ARVs do not kill all the HIV in the body so you need to take your ARVs every day for the rest of your life to keep the HIV under control.

ART is treatment for life and should not be stopped and restarted.

Taking your ARVs

Choose a time

ARVs must be taken every day at the same time. Choose the best time for you - when you wake up, at bed-time or after you brush your teeth. Make it part of your daily life.

Have a support system

Tell someone you trust about your status – this person can help remind you to take your treatment.

If you miss a dose...

It is normal to sometimes forget a dose or to take one late. When you miss a dose, take the forgotten dose as soon as you remember and then go back to your usual time.



Side effects

Side effects are the body's reaction to medication. Everyone will probably have some side effects at the start of treatment like **nausea, headache, dizziness** or **diarrhoea**. These should stop within a few weeks of starting treatment.

Some people experience **vomiting**, especially in the beginning when the body is still getting used to the medication. If you do vomit **in the hour** after you take your ARVs, you must take another dose (all of them) straight away.

**Don't stop taking
your ARVs as
normal.**



A few people will have **serious side effects**. If this happens to you, don't stop taking your treatment, but go to the health facility as soon as possible and tell them your symptoms.

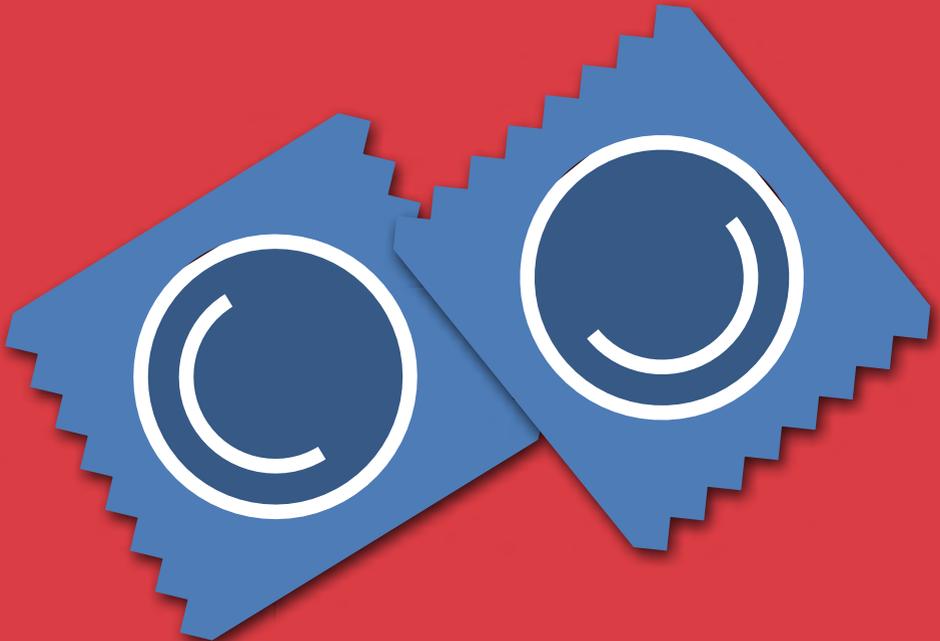
Risks of poor adherence

Poor adherence is when you take your pills late, forget to take doses, don't take all of your pills or stop treatment. The risks are:

- **You will get sick:** If you do not take your ARVs properly, the HIV will multiply and destroy your CD4 cells so you can't fight off diseases.
- **HIV becomes resistant:** If the HIV finds too few ARVs in your blood, it learns how to change itself so that it can resist the ARV medicine. Your ARVs will no longer work to kill the HIV in your blood.

- **You can transmit HIV to others:** Without enough ARVs in your blood, your viral load will go up. This means that you can pass HIV to your baby during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding or infect your partner through unprotected sex.

Even if you are taking your ARVs properly, you should still practice safe sex by using a condom correctly every time you have sex.



Tips for living positively

- **Take ARVs with food** to reduce nausea and other side-effects.
- Eat a balanced, **healthy diet** to help your body stay strong.
- **Reduce drugs and alcohol**, they can affect how ARVs work and make you forget to take them.
- **Get support**
— if you can't ask family and friends, join a support group or talk to your healthcare worker.
- **Use tools** to help you take your ARVs like cell phone apps, pill boxes and alarms.



Stay on track to give yourself the best chance of a healthy life living with HIV.

National AIDS Helpline

0800 012 322

Call this number if you have any other questions about HIV or need more information about what you have read in this leaflet.

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www.nacosa.org.za



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