



Medication adherence means taking your HIV drugs when and how you are suppose to, as directed by your physician. Medication adherence is extremely important because it affects how well your HIV medications decrease your viral load. The lower your viral load, the healthier you are likely to be. Adherence also helps to prevent drug resistance. If you skip a dose of your medication, even once, the virus can take that opportunity to replicate. When you skip doses, you may develop strains of HIV that are resistant to the medications you are currently taking, and possibly even to medications you haven't taken yet. If this happens, it could leave you with fewer treatment options.

Establishing Medication Adherence

Before you begin an HIV treatment regimen, there are several steps you can take to help you with adherence:

- Talk with your health-care provider or your case manager about your treatment plan and develop a plan that works for you.
- Be sure you understand why adherence is so important. When you know the possible consequences of not adhering to your treatment plan, you may be more motivated to stick with it.
- Get a written copy of your treatment plan that lists each of your medications and describes how and when to take them.
- Learn all the possible side effects of your medications so that you know what to expect and how to manage any problems.
- Adherence can be harder if you are dealing with life challenges, like substance abuse/alcoholism, unstable housing, mental illness, relationship issues, or other issues. Talk to your doctor about any challenges you may be facing that could affect your ability to take your HIV meds.
- Consider a "dry run." Use candy or vitamins to practice your treatment regimen.
- Schedule taking your medications around your daily routines. That can make it easier to remember and stick to your regimen.

Maintaining Medication Adherence

Adhering to your treatment schedule takes discipline. The more you do something, the easier it gets, and HIV treatment is no different. Here are some ideas that may help you stay on your HIV treatment plan:

1. Integrate the regimen into your daily life.

Fit the medications into your life instead of structuring your life around your medications.

2. Count out your doses in advance.

Use a pill box to prepare your medications for one week, or even two weeks, in advance. Note that some medications need refrigeration. If that is the case, keep the pill boxes in the refrigerator or a cool place.

3. Keep a checklist.

Make a daily checklist of the pills you have to take and the times you should take them. Check off each dose after it is taken. This will help to avoid missed or double doses.

4. Use a beeping alarm.

Use a beeping watch or timer to remind you when a dose is due. Many HIV providers can supply you with alarms or can help you find one that is affordable and sometimes free of charge.

5. Put dosage times into your daily planner.

Just like an appointment, add your medication doses into your daily planner to remind you when a dose is due.

6. Plan ahead for traveling, refills and weekends.

Pack your medications and keep them with you when traveling. Keep in mind that your schedule may change while on vacation and you will need to adjust how you take your medications. Also, plan ahead for your refills. Don't wait until you are out to call your pharmacy to order a refill. Give the pharmacy a minimum of three days to get your refills ready.

7. Arrange for privacy.

If you want to hide the fact you take medications, arrange for some private time at work when you can take your medications. Scout out a place such as a bathroom where you can take your medications in private.

8. Keep a diary.

Write down successes as well as failures to remind you what has worked and what has not. Record missed doses to identify times or doses that need to be worked on to improve adherence.

9. Establish and use a support network.

Find friends or family that can assist you in taking your medications. Support groups and others living with HIV/AIDS can help with reminders and serve as a partner in therapy. Realizing others are struggling as you are can help with feelings of isolation. Develop a working relationship with your health-care team.

10. Leave yourself notes and reminders.

Leave notes around the house where you will be sure to see them: the refrigerator, next to the TV, and the bathroom mirror.