



plain and simple facts

DRUG INFORMATION



Starting anti-HIV medications

If you have HIV, starting anti-HIV medications is a big decision. It is difficult to decide when to start taking the medications. Usually you have to continue the medications for life once you start them, and they have good and bad effects. It is important to talk with your doctor, pharmacist and other people living with HIV/AIDS who are taking medications before you make a decision about starting them. Don't rush into starting the medications. Take the time you need to consider all your questions before making your decision. However, you should understand that waiting too long before starting anti-HIV medications may put your health at risk.

Some of the good things about taking anti-HIV medications:

- They can help you stay healthy longer or get your health back.
- They may help you live longer.
- They can keep your immune system healthy, reducing your chance of getting AIDS-related illnesses.
- They can help reduce the damage to your immune system by the HIV virus.

Some of the bad things about taking anti-HIV medications:

- You have to take a number of pills every day, usually at about the same times each day.
- They have side effects that can be unpleasant or even harmful.
- You may have to change your eating and drinking habits.
- Others may find out you have HIV from your medications.
- Some HIV medications and other drugs, herbs or food do not mix well together.

Think about these questions before you choose your anti-HIV medications:

- Do you have a stable place to live?
- Do the people you live with know you have HIV?
- Do you have a refrigerator where you live?
- If you work, do the people you work with know you have HIV?
- Do you work the same hours every day or do you have changing shifts?
- Can you store things in a refrigerator at your workplace?
- Can you get to a bathroom easily at your workplace?
- Do you spend most of your time living in one city?
- Can you swallow pills without difficulty?

Canadian AIDS Treatment
Information Exchange



Réseau canadien
d'info-traitements sida

www.catie.ca

Starting anti-HIV medications

- Have you taken HIV medications before?
- Have you taken other medications on a regular basis before?
- Do you usually sleep and wake up around the same time every day?
- Do you usually eat every day?
- Do you have any special diet or food needs?
- Do you think you can drink 8-12 glasses of water every day?

Deciding on a combination that will best suit your needs:

- It is very important to take all the medications the way they are prescribed. So, choosing which combination of medications to take is very important.
- If any of your answers to the above questions is “NO,” it may mean that you would have some difficulty taking some of the anti-HIV medications.
- When you talk with your physician about which anti-HIV medications to take, your answers to the above questions can help your physician design a combination that will suit your situation and lifestyle so that you can stick to the treatment easier.

Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV-related illness and the treatments in question.



The Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) in good faith provides information resources to help people living with HIV/AIDS who wish to manage their own health care in partnership with their care providers. Information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE, however, is not to be considered medical advice. We do not recommend or advocate particular treatments and we urge users to consult as broad range of sources as possible. We strongly urge readers to consult with a qualified medical practitioner prior to undertaking any decision, use or action of a medical nature.

We do not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of any information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE. Persons relying on this information do so entirely at their own risk. Neither CATIE nor the Public Health Agency of Canada nor any of their employees, directors, officers or volunteers may be held liable for damages of any kind that may result from the use or misuse of any such information. The views expressed herein or in any article or publication accessed or published or provided by CATIE are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the policies or opinions of CATIE or the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Copyright: This Fact Sheet is made available through a collaboration between Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS) and the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE). Original content developed by ACAS, 2001.

This information is also available in French, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Swahili, and other languages at languages.catie.ca and www.acas.org

Funding has been provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada.