Early treatment helps people with HIV live longer and healthier lives. It’s time to get the facts and think about starting treatment today.

Other Steps You Can Take to Stay Healthy

• Eat a healthy diet and be physically active.
• Quit smoking. For help, call 311 and ask for the Smokers’ Quitline.
• Get help for depression, or for alcohol and drug problems. Talk to your health care provider or call 311 and ask for LifeNet (see More Information and Help).
• Stay safe! Never have sex without a latex condom, reduce your number of partners, and never share needles or works. Even if your viral load is not detectable, you can still transmit HIV.
• Get tested regularly for other sexually transmitted diseases. Having another STD can make it harder to manage HIV.

More Information and Help

• Useful phone numbers:
  • HIV Information Hotline (800) 541-AIDS
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• For help with depression or alcohol and drug problems, or to find a needle exchange program:
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• Health Bulletins: Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health:
  • #78 STOP HIV IN NYC
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This publication was supported by grant number H89HA00015 from the Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources Services Administration, HIV/AIDS Bureau (HRSA).
HIV infection is a lifelong condition. Left untreated, it can progress to AIDS.

- Unless something holds HIV in check, it multiplies inside your body, killing off CD4 cells and weakening your immune system.
- You may feel fine at first, but untreated HIV eventually destroys the immune system, causing severe illness and death.
- If you have HIV, there are two tests you should get regularly:
  - A viral load test, which shows how much HIV is circulating in your blood
  - A CD4 test, which shows how well your immune system is holding up
- Early treatment can block HIV from progressing quickly and shut down further damage to your immune system.

Early treatment helps you stay healthy and live longer.

- If you have HIV, medicine called antiretroviral therapy (ART for short) can slow damage to your body. ART is also sometimes called HAART, for highly-active antiretroviral therapy.
- Today, HIV treatment is easier to take and has fewer side effects.
- If you start ART early, you are less likely to develop AIDS and the other serious health problems HIV can cause.
- ART also helps you reduce your chance of transmitting HIV to others.

Get care and start treatment as soon as you can.

- If you have HIV, don’t delay; get medical care. To find an HIV doctor, call 311.
- During your next visit, talk to your health care provider about starting HIV treatment.
- Starting ART early – and sticking with it – helps people with HIV live longer and healthier lives.

Myths about HIV Treatment

1. “I’m not feeling sick, so I don’t need treatment.” FALSE.
   Don’t wait until you are sick to start treatment.
   - Early treatment with anti-retroviral therapy (ART) keeps your CD4 count up and your viral load down.
   - It helps protect against infections and other health problems, including heart disease, liver disease, kidney disease and certain cancers.

2. “My CD4 counts are still pretty high – no need to start treatment yet.” FALSE.
   Don’t wait until your CD4 counts drop too low.
   - Doctors now recommend starting ART when CD4 counts drop below 500.
   - You may benefit from treatment even if your counts are OVER 500. Talk to your health care provider about what’s right for you.

3. “I’m pregnant, so treatment may need to wait.” FALSE.
   Pregnant women with HIV should start treatment right away.
   - If you are pregnant or planning pregnancy, ART will improve your health and greatly cut the chance that your baby will be born with HIV.

4. “I take good care of myself. I exercise and eat well. I’ll be fine without treatment.” FALSE.
   Only ART can fight HIV infection.
   - It is important that people with HIV take good care of their health (see Other Steps You Can Take to Stay Healthy).
   But only ART can treat HIV infection by lowering the virus and strengthening the immune system. And a stronger immune system means you can stay healthy and live longer.

5. “HIV meds have really bad side-effects. And I’ll have to take so many pills.” FALSE.
   HIV medicines are much easier to take than they used to be.
   - Today’s medications are less likely to cause body shape changes and other side-effects. And the pills are more convenient to take. You may even be able to take a one-a-day pill.
   - If it’s hard for you to remember when to take your medication, your health care provider or pharmacist can help with reminders, such as alarms. Or you can join a program that helps people take medication.

6. “It’s okay to go on and off ART.” FALSE.
   HIV medication has to be taken every day as prescribed.
   - If you miss doses, your medicine will stop working. Your CD4 counts will go down and your viral load will rise.
   - You could also develop drug-resistant HIV, which is much harder to treat.

7. “If I’m taking ART, I can’t spread HIV.” FALSE.
   HIV meds greatly reduce your chances of spreading HIV to others – but it can still happen.
   - It’s important to understand that ART doesn’t cure HIV and you can still transmit HIV.
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8. “I can’t afford treatment, so I’ll have to go without it.” FALSE.
   Help is available!
   - New York State offers programs and insurance options to help you pay for medication. (see More Information and Help).
   - No one has to go without treatment because they can’t afford it.

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