



Patient's Guide to HIV Treatment

HIV treatment, also called antiretroviral therapy (ART), involves taking medicine to reduce the amount of HIV in your body. ART is highly effective at getting the virus under control, and most patients will have undetectable virus in their blood within 6 months of starting treatment. There is no cure for HIV, but ART when taken as prescribed can keep HIV under control. There are different forms of treatment available, including tablets and intramuscular injections.

What are the benefits?

- Taking your HIV medicine as prescribed will help keep your viral load low and CD4 cell count high.
- HIV medicine can make your viral load very low, which is called viral suppression. When your viral load is <200 copies per mL of blood, you are considered virally suppressed.
- HIV medicine can make the viral load so low that a test can't detect it, which is called an undetectable viral load.
- If you stop taking your medicine, your viral load will begin to multiply rapidly, and you will have detectable virus once again.
- Getting and keeping an undetectable viral load (or staying virally suppressed) is the best way to stay healthy and protect others.

How do I know if my medications are working?

Your medical provider will order the following labs to monitor your response to HIV treatment.

CD4 Count

CD4 cells help your body fight infection. HIV attacks and lowers the number of CD4 cells in your blood.

Viral Load

Viral load is the amount of HIV in your blood. When your viral load is high, you have more HIV in your body attacking your immune system.

To make an appointment through UC Health, please call (513) 475-8585. For more information about HIV, call the Ohio HIV Hotline at 1-800-332-2437 or visit the CDC website by using this code.



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What forms of treatment are available?

HIV treatment typically includes a regimen containing 2-3 medications that target the HIV virus. Your provider will check if you have any treatment resistance when selecting a regimen that is best for you. If you have resistance, your provider will select medications that are active based on your resistance tests.

Tablets:

- There are a variety of HIV treatment options in single-pill, once-a-day tablets that contain 2-3 medications targeting the virus.
- Talk your doctor if you have difficulty swallowing pills, so they can help choose a pill size that is appropriate for you.
- If you have a history of resistance or treatment failure, you may not be able to take single-pill, once-a-day options. Talk with your doctor about finding a treatment option that is best for you.

Injections:

- There is an injectable option for the treatment of HIV for patients who are undetectable.
- This option requires patients to come in either once a month, or every other month, for a nurse to administer two injections in the hip area.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *HIV Basics. Living with HIV*



Missed doses?

You **must** take HIV treatment as prescribed to stay undetectable and avoid resistance to medications. If you miss a dose, it is okay to take it as soon as you remember, then take your next dose at the usual time. If you miss a lot of doses, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about ways to help you remember to take your medicine.

What are common side effects?

- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Headache
- Rash
- Fatigue
- Difficulty Sleeping
- Dry mouth
- Dizziness

U=U

Undetectable = Untransmittable.

This means, if you have an undetectable viral load, you have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to an HIV-negative partner through sex. In order to stay undetectable, you must take your HIV medications exactly as prescribed.



This conference is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$4,067,580 with zero percentage financed with nongovernmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.

June 2023