HIV/AIDS

Adherence

What is adherence?

Treatment adherence means taking the correct dose of your medications every time, exactly as prescribed by your health care provider or recommended by your pharmacist. To successfully halt HIV replication and keep viral load suppressed, HIV meds need to be maintained at high enough levels in the blood, 24 hours a day, every day. If the drug levels become too low, drug resistance may occur. HIV drug resistance can cause your meds to stop working properly and may limit future treatment options.

When selecting a new HIV medication or starting meds for the first time, you may want to look at your lifestyle to see if there are any potential adherence obstacles. Here is a list of questions for you to consider when discussing adherence and making treatment decisions with your health care provider:

- Does your daily schedule change a lot?
- What is your typical eating schedule each day?
- Do you have a difficult time swallowing pills?
- Are you taking other medications?
- What side effects can you tolerate?
- What happens if you miss a dose?

Treatment adherence can affect anyone. Don’t feel guilty about talking to your doctor about any difficulty you may have with taking your medications as prescribed. There are certain situations that have been found to affect adherence.

Attitude: People who feel most strongly that their medication is doing them good typically have an easier time adhering to their regimens. Understanding how and why the medications work can help with adherence.

Mood: People who are depressed have a harder time adhering to drug regimens than people who are not depressed. If you suspect you are depressed, talk to you health care provider.

Disorder: The amount of disorder in your life, and the stress it creates, can generate adherence

problems. Disorder can include more than just an unpredictable and overwhelming schedule of activities. Try to identify and lower the disorder in your life. Your health care provider or case manager may be able to help.

Primary Caregiver: The needs and concerns of the people you're caring for can be overwhelming and become your primary focus. It's important to remember that your health must come first; you can't care for others if you don't take care of yourself.

Talk to your health care provider if you need help addressing any adherence challenges. Finding other people in your situation can also help. Join a support group or connect with other people living with in the POZ Forums.

How can I improve adherence?

Here are some tips to help you take your HIV medicaton on schedule.

1. Keep your meds next to something you use regularly. Having your meds near your coffee pot or your toothbrush can help remind you to take them daily.
2. Sign up for a reminder service. Many AIDS service organizations and pharmacies have free programs that will call to remind you to take your medications. There are also free reminder services online that will send you a text message or email at a specified time.
3. Program your cell phone. Set an alarm on your phone at various times of the day and night.
4. Travel with extra doses. Travel with your meds in your carry-on luggage, and bring a few extra doses in case of flight delays and cancellations.
5. Stay on schedule. Some people have more trouble remembering to take their medication on their days off work or school, or other times when their schedule is different than usual.
6. Organize your meds. One-week, two-week and one-month pillboxes are available to help you organize your meds in advance.
7. Meds on the go. If you find that you regularly need to take your outside of the house, check out portable pocket-sized pill cases. Some even have built-in timers.
8. Plan ahead. Make sure that you regularly refill your prescriptions so you don't run out of your medications.

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