



HIV IN THE BODY

HIV is a virus that weakens the immune system, which protects your body against infection and disease. When your immune system is weak, your body cannot fight infections and diseases. If HIV is not treated with ARVs, you can get a collection of diseases called Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

IMMUNE SYSTEM IS WEAKENED



GETTING TREATMENT FOR HIV

Antiretroviral treatment (ARVs) are medications that are the only way to control HIV. Adherence – taking ARVs as told by a healthcare worker - reduces the amount of HIV in the body: the CD4 count goes up and the immune system recovers. This is called *viral suppression*. This does not mean HIV has been cured, it means there is only a small amount of HIV in the blood, that you will enjoy better health, and that there is less chance of transmitting HIV to somebody else.

VIRAL SUPPRESSION



LIVING HEALTHILY WITH HIV

The best way to stay healthy if you have HIV is by testing and starting treatment as soon as possible, rather than waiting to get sick or have symptoms. Talk to your healthcare worker to find out which treatment plan will be best for you, how to get support and how to manage any side effects, so that you are able to take the treatment correctly for the rest of your life.

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“Living well means having the right mindset and attitude, eating healthy, the right lifestyle, and taking your medication, always taking your ARVs.”

Cindy Pivacic



ADHERING TO ARVs

Once you start taking ARVs you must take them every day at the same time. It is a lifelong commitment. It is important not to skip or stop taking ARVs, even for one day.

You must always go for clinic follow-up visits and collect your ARVs on time, so you don't run out. Missing or stopping your ARVs can lead to drug resistance, where the treatment no longer works to control HIV.

TREATING INFECTIONS

You may suffer from opportunistic infections related to HIV, side effects from taking ARVs or other common infections.

If you get sick, tell your healthcare worker as soon as possible and get treatment. With treatment, most infections can be cured successfully.

CHOOSING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

For people living with HIV, a healthy lifestyle is the same as it is for anyone else. It involves:

- Eating a balanced diet;
- Getting regular exercise;
- Getting enough rest;
- Taking care of your mental and emotional well-being; and
- Regular hand washing with soap and water.

Choosing a healthy lifestyle will help you to:

- Process ARVs and manage any side effects.
- Keep your immune system stronger so that it can fight infections and disease better.
- Lower your risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, cancers and hypertension.
- Reach and stay at a healthy weight.
- Always ask your healthcare worker to take your weight during clinic visits.

FOLLOWING A BALANCED DIET

Making healthy food and drink choices can make you feel better and have more energy. Healthy eating means having a balanced diet of basic, fresh low fat and high fibre foods.

If you find that taking ARVs makes you feel nauseous or make it hard to eat, talk to your community health worker, a healthcare worker or a dietician.

