

ATTACKS CD4 CELLS



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

ACCEPTING YOUR HIV STATUS

Some young people struggle to come to terms with having HIV. You need to understand that HIV is real, the tests are accurate, and if you have HIV, taking ARVs will help you stay healthy.

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"I was 14 years old, at a school trip when I first found out about my status. I honestly did not understand how I had gotten the virus because it never even dawned on me that maybe my parents could have passed on because of HIV/AIDS. So I just pushed the whole HIV thing to the back of my mind."

ADOLESCENTS

Sadie Brown



TAKING ARVs

Because young people with HIV are still growing, the type and strength of ARVs is based on your weight, or stage of development. Your healthcare worker will decide what is best for you. Some young people find it difficult to adjust when they are moved from the paediatric regime of ARVs, used for children, to an adult regime. Talk to your healthcare worker if you are having any problems with your ARVs. Once you start treatment, you must adhere to your ARVs, which means taking your ARVs as the healthcare worker has told you to, every day, without missing a dose or stopping, even if you feel better.

Adhering to your treatment leads to viral load suppression, which means you can enjoy:

- Better health;
- A better quality of life;
- Less chance of transmitting HIV to a sexual partner;
- Being able to have HIV-negative children; and
- A long and healthy life.

TAKING YOUR TREATMENT CORRECTLY

To make sure you take your treatment correctly and reach viral suppression you should:

- Find out as much as possible about HIV by reading or talking to others.
- Talk to your healthcare worker about your treatment and any problems you have taking your ARVs.
- Get support from an adult you trust to help you understand what it means to be HIV positive and help you take your ARVs.
- Develop a routine for taking your pills at the same time every day.
- Set an alarm or reminder on your cell phone and take your ARVs when it goes off.
- Join a teen club or support group for young people living with HIV.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR FEELINGS

Knowing that you have HIV may make you feel confused, angry, or sad, and you may have questions about where it came from and what your future will hold. Dealing with these feelings can be difficult, and it may take time to feel comfortable about what having HIV means for you.

Looking after your feelings means you should:

- Work out what feelings you are going through.
- Accept what you are feeling and remind yourself that it is okay to feel that way.
- Express what you are feeling by talking to somebody you trust or writing down or drawing how you feel.
- Try to work out what is causing any bad feelings, and what may make you feel better.
- Think of a healthy way to take care of yourself like resting, taking a walk, listening to music or asking for a hug.
- Ask for professional help at the clinic if you are feeling that you cannot cope.