

Are there tips to help me with my adherence?

- Have a treatment supporter or buddy who reminds you to take your ARVs. It could be your wife, husband, boyfriend, girlfriend or anyone you trust and who cares about you.
- Use a daily or weekly pillbox. Then you can check if you have missed a dose.
- Use a pill beeper, an alarm clock or a reminder on your cell phone to remind you to take your pills.
- If you go away for a few days, make sure you have enough pills.
- Keep a supply where you may need them in an emergency, such as at a friend's house.
- Attend a support group – sharing your experience with others helps.
- Openness makes it easier!

What ARVs should I start on?

- We have to use 3 different ARV combinations to suppress HIV.
- These ARVs can either be taken as 3 separate pills or as a Fixed Dose Combination (FDC) which is one pill that contains all 3 of the ARVs.
- This one pill has the same effect as taking the 3 ARVs as separate pills and helps improve adherence as it is easier to take just one pill once a day.
- The FDC pill that we are currently using in South Africa is a combination of Tenofovir, Emtricitabine and Efavirenz.
- Some people may not be able to take FDC due to other complications such as liver disease, kidney problems or severe psychiatric conditions.
- If this is the case for you, your doctor or nurse will prescribe a different combination of ARVs that will work for you.
- Remember ARVs cannot work alone – eat well, don't smoke, don't drink too much or use drugs.

Testing for HIV is the first step to planning your future - with or without HIV. We are all at risk. Everyone has sex. You need to protect yourself and your sexual partner.

Get tested. Get treated!

Preventing HIV

- Medical Male Circumcision (MMC) reduces a man's risk of getting HIV by up to 60%. Circumcisions are free and are available at many government clinics and hospitals. Ask at your clinic for your nearest MMC site.
- Circumcision only provides partial protection. You must still use a condom every time you have sex – even if you are circumcised.
- Reducing your number of sexual partners reduces your chances of getting HIV.
- Being drunk lowers your inhibitions and may increase risky sexual behaviour. Reduce your alcohol intake.
- You can have sex and not give HIV to your partner if you use a condom every time you have sex.
- Get treatment immediately for any infection or discharge in your penis, vagina or anus. Health workers are trained and are used to seeing genitals. There is nothing to be shy about.

HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT)

- You should receive counselling before and after testing
- Counselling prepares you for the result, so you can think how a positive or a negative result will affect you.

If you test HIV positive

- You can live a full and normal life, including having a family and achieving your dreams.
- Thanks to ARVs, HIV is a chronic manageable condition like diabetes or high blood pressure (hypertension).
- Have a CD4 count and viral load test so you can know when to start ARVs.
- Get informed. Plan your future. Speak to your health worker.
- Read our pamphlet "I've tested HIV positive, now what?"

Protect yourself. Protect others.



English



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ARVs

YOU CAN BEAT IT!

Hi my name is Nokuzola.
ARVs have saved my life.
Let me tell you how.



ARVs and your immune system

- Your immune system is made up of different cells that help you fight off HIV infection. The CD4 cells (soldier cells) are the most important.
- HIV kills your CD4 cells (soldier cells) which are part of your immune system. When this happens you start to get sick.
- ARVs reduce HIV in your body and help your immune system to recover.
- When HIV goes DOWN your CD4 (soldier cells) go UP.
- When your CD4 (soldier cells) go up, you are able to fight infections.
- You will start to put on weight, feel better and be healthy.

Knowing your CD4 cell count and viral load

- After testing positive you must have a CD4 count and a viral load count.
- Your CD4 count measures the number of CD4 cells in each drop of blood.
- Knowing your CD4 count tells you when to start ARVs.
- Your viral load count measures the amount of HIV in each drop of blood.
- You are entitled to get a CD4 count every 6 months.
- You are entitled to a viral load test every year.

Everyone who is HIV-positive will eventually need to use ARVs.



When should I use ARVs?

- You start using ARVs when your body's CD4 cells are at 500 per drop of blood.
- Some people may need to start using ARVs when their CD4 count is higher than 500. If you have TB or if you have any Stage 4 illnesses you need to start ARVs regardless of your CD4 count.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding then you should start taking ARVs immediately.
- Many people don't know their HIV status. They only test when they get sick and start using ARVs too late.
- The good news is that ARVs are amazing! People who have been very sick with AIDS and have had very low CD4 counts have regained health and life.
- Everyone who is HIV-positive will eventually need to use ARVs.
- Ask your clinic about any changes in government policy of when you can start ARVs.

What happens when I start ARVs?

- ARVs work by stopping HIV from multiplying.
- When you start to take ARVs your viral load will go DOWN.
- The aim of ARVs is to bring your viral load DOWN to such a small amount that it is called 'undetectable'.
- If your viral load is undetectable, you still have HIV and can transmit HIV to your sexual partner. So you will still need to use a condom every time you have sex.

Side effects

- Most people will experience no side effects.
- Some people will have minor side effects. These may include skin rash, runny tummy, headache, nausea, tiredness and sleeplessness. Often these will go away in the first 3 months on treatment.
- A few people may experience more serious side effects such as those that affect your liver.
- A small number of people will have very serious side effects.
- Report ALL side effects to your health worker immediately.
- Your health worker can give you medicine to help with minor and more serious side effects.
- More serious side effects can be overcome by changing ARVs.
- Remember: Side effects are worse when your CD4 count is very low. Starting ARVs at the right time makes them work better with fewer side effects.

How long can I live with ARVs?

- With proper medical management and good adherence it is possible to live for decades on ARVs.
- You can have a career, have children and lead a normal life on ARVs!

What is adherence?

- Adherence means taking your drugs exactly as prescribed by the health worker.
- Taking them at the right time every day is good adherence. Good adherence ensures that there is enough medicine in your body to keep your HIV under control.

What happens if my adherence is not good?

- If you don't take ARVs every day at the right time, they will stop working against the HIV.
- Your HIV is now resistant to the ARVs and you will get sick.
- This resistant HIV can be passed on to someone you have sex with. The ARVs will not work for that person either.

I have to take ARVs every day for the rest of my life. I take my ARVs every day and live a positive life.

