

Report Side Effects to your Doctor

Many HIV+ people worry about medication side effects. While all the HIV drugs can cause some side effects, not all people will experience the same effects to the same extent. In addition, many side effects become easier after the first few weeks.

Even if you continue to have difficulty with one treatment, you can usually do something about it, such as change to another drug, alter the dose of that drug or treat the side effect separately.

It will help if you know what to expect. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the possible side effects of your HIV drugs and how to manage them if they arise. Make sure you have doctor-recommended treatments at home for common side effects like nausea or diarrhea.

Do not let side effects interfere with adherence (taking your HIV medication exactly as prescribed.) Research has shown that people with higher numbers of side effects after the first month of treatment were less adherent and had lower viral load reductions three months later. The take-home message is that if you are experiencing side effects, you and your doctor should deal with them as early as possible.

Unfortunately, many people do not receive adequate help to manage side effects. If you want your doctor to really understand your side effects, you need to describe them clearly. The best way to do this is to keep a side effects diary. It should include information about frequency, duration and severity of side effects. You can grade the side effects on a scale of 1-10 (1 for very mild and 10 for very severe).

Explain to your doctor how the side effects impact your quality of life.




Many people tell their doctors they have chronic diarrhea without explaining that it stops them from going out to eat or to the movies. If you are feeling more anxious or nervous, are not sleeping properly, have a lower sex drive or are too nauseous to eat, your doctor needs to know in order to help you.

If you are considering stopping or interrupting treatment because of side effects, it is vital that you discuss the issues involved with your doctor. Don't just stop your HIV drugs as this may cause serious health problems.

While switching HIV individual drugs can be safe and may reduce side effects, make that decision in consultation with your doctor. You will need to consider:

- If the side effects can be treated.
- If the side effects are likely to get worse if you remain on the same drugs.
- If there are other HIV drugs you can use.

Your HIV drug combination has to be one you can tolerate. Work with your doctor to explore the best options for minimizing or eliminating your side effects without jeopardizing your HIV treatment. 

Adapted from HIV i-Base at <http://www.i-base.info/pub/guides/side802/index.html>

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