

# Staying on Schedule

Tips for taking your HIV medicines



Taking HIV medicines is a big step in fighting your HIV. These medicines can reduce the amount of HIV in your blood to very low levels and help you stay healthy. But you must take these drugs the right way all the time or they will stop working against HIV. This booklet tells you:

- The different types of HIV medicines.
- Why it is so important to take HIV medicines on time.
- Tips for making it easier to stay on schedule taking your HIV medicines.

## Why is it so important to take HIV medicines on time?

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When the HIV virus infects your body, the virus makes copies of itself. HIV medicines can help stop HIV from making copies of itself and can reduce the total amount of HIV in your body. But if you do not take HIV medicines on time, every day, they will stop working against the HIV. This is called drug **resistance**.

Once you become resistant to an HIV medicine, you will have to stop taking it and switch to another one. Taking all your HIV medicines on time is the key to keeping your HIV levels down and avoiding resistance. When you stick to your HIV medicine schedule very closely, it is called **adherence**.

### Words to remember

**Resistance**  
(ree-zis-tents)

When an HIV medicine cannot prevent the HIV virus from making copies of itself.

**Adherence**  
(ad-heer-ents)

Staying with your HIV medicine schedule.

# Talk with your doctor or health care provider

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Before you start taking HIV medicines, talk to your doctor or health care provider about the following things:

- Tell your doctor or health care provider about any other medicines you take. Even nonprescription drugs like headache pills, cold medicine, or herbs and supplements may cause side effects or prevent your HIV medicines from working properly.
- Understand what each drug does and why you are taking it.
- Tell your health care provider about any problems you might have staying on schedule. Ask for advice – work together on a plan to take your medicines on schedule.



# Taking different kinds (classes) of HIV medicines

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There are three kinds, or classes, of HIV medicines. Each class of drugs works against HIV in a different way. Your doctor or health care provider will probably start you on HIV medicines from two different classes.



**NRTIs** are Nucleoside or Nucleotide Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (sometimes called “nukes”). They block the first step that HIV takes to copy itself.

**NNRTIs** are Non-Nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (“non-nukes”). They block the first step that HIV takes to copy itself, but in a different way than NRTIs.

**PIs** are Protease Inhibitors. They block the last step that HIV takes to copy itself.

**Fusion Inhibitors** (or Entry Inhibitors) are medicines that stop HIV from getting into healthy cells.

**Fixed-dose combination drugs.** There are some medicines that combine two or three PIs or NRTIs into one pill. One medicine combines an NRTI and two NNRTIs. These medicines can help reduce the number of pills you have to take and make it easier to stick with your schedule.

**Integrase Inhibitors.** To make copies of itself, the HIV virus must break into the genetic “code” of healthy cells. This is called integration. Integrase inhibitors work by blocking this process.

## Resistance to a whole “class” of drugs

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HIV medicines within each class work the same way. If you become resistant to one HIV medicine, you may become resistant to all the medicines in that class. This can happen even if you have never taken any other medicines in that class.



## **Getting started:**

### **Ask the pharmacist any questions**

When you get a prescription, read the instructions right away, before you leave the drugstore. Ask the pharmacist any questions.

The prescription tells you:

- How much of the drug to take (the dose).
- How often you take the drug.
- Whether you take the drug with food or on an empty stomach.
- If you have to keep the drug in the refrigerator or store it with a drying packet.
- What side effects the drug may cause. If the drug can cause a very bad side effect, the pill container will have a special “Black Box” warning.
- Any special instructions for taking the drug.

# Rules for taking HIV medicines

Each medicine has instructions (rules) for how to take it. Read the instructions and follow them carefully. Here are some common instructions and what they mean:

**“Take twice a day”** means you take the first dose early in the day and the second dose about 12 hours later. So, if you take the first dose at 8 o’clock in the morning (8:00 a.m.), take the second dose at 8 o’clock in the evening (8:00 p.m.).



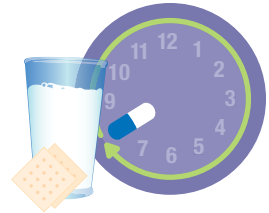
**“Take three times a day”**

means you take the three doses 8 hours apart. If you take the first dose when you get up in the morning at 7:00 a.m., you would take the second dose 8 hours later at 3:00 p.m. You would take the third dose 8 hours later, at 11:00 p.m.



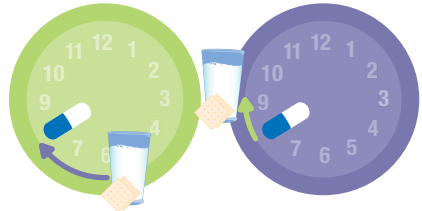
**“Take with a meal”** or **“Take with food”**

means you should not take the medicine on an empty stomach. If you do not want to eat a whole meal, eat a large snack, like a peanut butter sandwich, crackers with milk, or a granola bar and yogurt.



**“Take on an empty stomach”**

means you should take the medicine at least 1 hour before or 2 hours after you eat a snack or meal.



# Why do people miss doses of their HIV medicines?

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The most common reasons for people not taking HIV medicines are:

- Feeling sick from the side effects.
- Work or travel schedules make them forget.
- Total number of pills they have to take and whether or not they have to take them with food.
- Sleeping and eating schedules get in the way.
- Depression or other mental health problems.
- Using drugs or alcohol — forgetting or not taking their HIV medicines.
- Not understanding how important it is to take medicines on schedule.

If you take all your HIV medicines on time from the start, you have a better chance of keeping your HIV under control from the start. Then you will not have to switch drugs.

## Don't let side effects change your schedule!

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Side effects like upset stomach (nausea), headaches, and diarrhea are common when you start taking HIV medicines. Read the prescription to find out what side effects might occur. Most side effects go away within a few weeks. Some HIV medicines are stronger than others and produce stronger side effects. Do not skip doses or stop taking your HIV medicines because of side effects! If the medicine makes you very sick, call your doctor or health care provider right away. He or she may lower the dosage or use another HIV medicine to reduce the side effects. To learn more about side effects, see page 8.

# How can I remember to take my HIV medicines on time?

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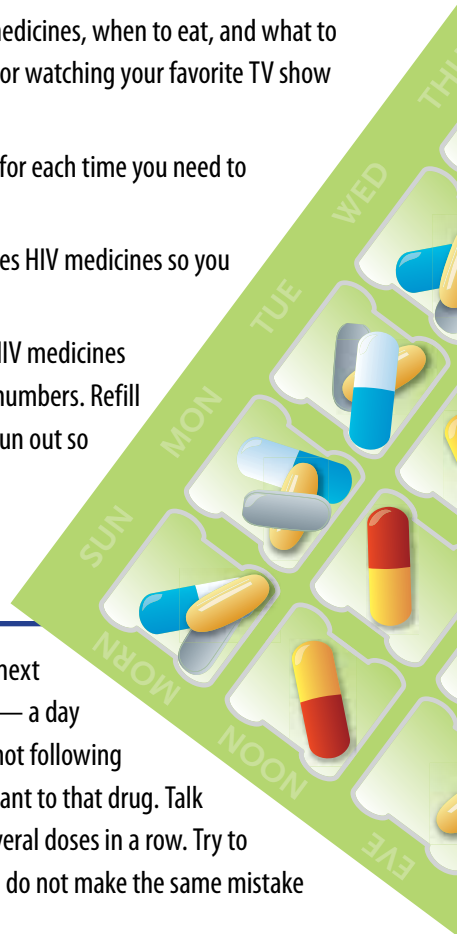
Here are some tips:

- Do a “trial run” before you start taking HIV medicines to see if you have trouble sticking with a schedule. Use jellybeans instead of pills.
- Use a pillbox with a separate box for each day of the week.
- Make “dose packs” of the pills you need to take with you when you leave home.
- Make a daily “timeline” of when to take your medicines, when to eat, and what to eat. Pick a daily activity – like leaving for work or watching your favorite TV show — and take your pills at that time every day.
- Use a wristwatch with an alarm. Set the alarm for each time you need to take a pill.
- Find a “dose buddy” — someone who also takes HIV medicines so you can help each other stay on schedule.
- Keep all the prescription information for your HIV medicines together in one place, with emergency phone numbers. Refill your prescriptions at least a week before they run out so you are not left without medicines.

## What if I miss a dose?

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If you miss one dose, do not take a double dose the next time to make up for it. Never take a drug “holiday” — a day or a weekend off. Missing several doses in a row or not following instructions for taking your pills can make you resistant to that drug. Talk to your doctor or health care provider if you miss several doses in a row. Try to remember the reasons for missing doses so that you do not make the same mistake again in the future.





# Make a promise to yourself – and to your health

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Learn about all your HIV treatment choices and work with your doctor to come up with a plan that is best for you. Taking HIV medicines is a key part of fighting your HIV. Tell yourself that nothing is more important than your health – and that nothing will get in the way of taking your HIV medicines on schedule. That way, you will get the most benefit from these drugs and have the best chance of beating HIV.

## To learn more about taking HIV medicines . . .

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The New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute has more booklets to help you with your HIV medicine schedule:

**Staying on Schedule: How to Take Each HIV Medicine** is a companion to this booklet. It lists all HIV medicines, includes pictures of them, and tells you how and when to take them. It is only available on the website – not in print form: **[www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/publications](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/publications)**. Look under “Medications and Treatment Adherence.”

**Managing Side Effects of HIV Medicines** explains side effects generally and lists specific side effects of each HIV medicine. It is on the website at:

**[www.health.ny.gov/publications/9408.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/9408.pdf)**

You can order print copies online, call **518-474-9866** or email **[HIVPUBS@health.state.ny.us](mailto:HIVPUBS@health.state.ny.us)**.

**AIDS Community Research of America (ACRIA)** is in New York City. It studies new treatments for HIV/AIDS and offers information about scientific studies of new HIV medicines:

**212-924-3934**

**[www.acria.org](http://www.acria.org)**

## Hotline numbers

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If you have a question about HIV medicines and you cannot reach your doctor or health care provider, call one of these free hotline numbers:

### **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Treatment Hotline** (AIDS Info)

**1-800-448-0440**

### **New York State Department of Health**

**1-800-541-AIDS** (English)

**1-800-233-SIDA** (Spanish)

### **HIV/AIDS TDD Information Line**

Voice callers can use the New York Relay System:

**1-800-369-2437**

or call **711** or **1-800-421-1220** and ask the operator to dial **1-800-541-2437**



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