

## ABOUT ART AND GOALS

**Antiretroviral Therapy or ART** is the type of medicine that treats HIV. ART cannot cure HIV, but it can help people with HIV stay healthy and live longer. For most people, ART is made up of 3 different medications. Sometimes these medications are all in the same pill. When someone is on ART, it is important that they take their medication every day as prescribed by their provider. This is called Medication Adherence. Good medication adherence helps bring the virus down to low levels in the body. The goal is to have an undetectable viral load. An undetectable viral load helps keep the body healthy and lowers the risk of passing HIV onto partners. Like any medicine, there are some risks and side effects to ART. The provider will talk about these side effects during the appointment.

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Drug and alcohol use can raise the risk of getting HIV or make it harder for someone with HIV to stay healthy. Sometimes people who use drugs and alcohol have risky sex, share needles/works, miss medical appointments, or do not take their medications as prescribed. Examples of substances that when used are risky for people with HIV are: alcohol, crack cocaine, opioids (pain meds), methamphetamine, inhalants (poppers).

Help is available for people who are using substances. A medical provider or case manager can help someone find counseling, self-help meetings, or in-patient treatment.

## STI'S, SAFE SEX AND LOWER RISK

On June 9th, 2020, the CDC released a statement that 1.2 billion people in the United States have HIV and about 161, 800 persons who are living with HIV are not aware of that they are infected. Today, 40% of the new diagnosis's for HIV are people who did not know they were living with HIV. People who engage in unprotected sex should get tested for HIV every six months to a year.

Other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are passed from one person to another by sexual activity (vaginal, anal, or oral sex) and sometimes it's just skin to skin contact. STI's can be prevented by not having sex (abstinence). For people who have sex, using condoms and a lubricant can lower the risk of infection. NOTE: Lambskin condoms DO NOT protect against STIs.

Common STIs are HIV, Syphilis, Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Herpes Simples Virus, Hepatitis B and C.

### References

- 1.) HIV Disease Process <https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/understanding-hiv-aids/facts-sheets/19/45/hiv-aids-the-basics>
- 2.) Medication Adherence/Tips chart <https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/understanding-hiv-aids/facts-sheets/21/54/hiv-medication-adherence> [https://www.womenheart.org/page/Resources\\_MedAdheren](https://www.womenheart.org/page/Resources_MedAdheren)
- 3.) ART Medication [https://www.hivguidelines.org/antiretroviral-therapy/when-to-start-art/#tab\\_1\\_4](https://www.hivguidelines.org/antiretroviral-therapy/when-to-start-art/#tab_1_4)) Risk Reduction/Stages <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/substanceuse.html> <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/hiv-prevention/reducing-risk-from-alcohol-and-drug-use/substance-use-and-hiv-risk> <https://www.hiv.va.gov/provider/manual-primary-care/prevention-for-positives.asp>
- 5.) STDs <https://www.cdc.gov/std/default.htm>
- 6.) Safe Sex [http://www.sexualityeducation.com/safe\\_sex.php](http://www.sexualityeducation.com/safe_sex.php)
- 7.) Nutrition <https://www.hiv.va.gov/patient/daily/diet/overview.asp>
- 8.) Oral Health <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/h/hiv-aids-and-dental-health> <https://www.ada.org/en/member-center/oral-health-topics/hiv>

## PREVENTION STRATEGIES

### Decide your limit

Choose what sexual activities you are comfortable with and what is safe for you.

### Know the tools

Condoms, lube, dental dams, gloves, and finger cots are tools that can be used to prevent STIs.

### Keep the tools nearby

Having your tools nearby, makes it easier to practice safe sex and prevention.

### Communicate

Talk to your partner about safe sex and STI testing BEFORE you have sex. If you join in risky sexual behavior, get tested at least once every year.

### Get tested

Ask your provider about STI testing. Get tested with your partner(s).

### Limit the number of partners

The more partners someone has, the higher the risk of STI.

### Avoid drugs and alcohol

Sometimes it is hard to have safe sex if drugs and alcohol are in the mix. If you feel like drugs or alcohol are becoming a problem, ask your provider or case manager for help.



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## WHAT IS HIV? Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HIV is a virus, HIV is spread through contact with the blood, precum, semen, vaginal fluids, anal secretions, and breast milk. In the United States, HIV is mainly spread through sex without condoms or sharing drug injection equipment with a person who has HIV.

# Key Terms to Know

**CD4 (T-Cells):** These are the cells in the body that fight infection. This number should be high and a normal CD4 count is 350-1500.

**Viral Load:** This is a count of how much virus is in the blood. This number should be very low. The goal is for the lab test to be unable to detect any virus in the blood, otherwise known as “undetectable”.

If your Viral Load is more than 200 copies (of the virus) you are considered “detectable”. Most likely people at the beginning stage of HIV infection or who have not taken their prescribed medication will have more than 200 copies. This means there is a greater chance of infection since the immune system is under attack by the virus.

When a person is undetectable, they have little or no risk of spreading HIV to a partner if they take their medication as prescribed. It is recommended that persons living with HIV continue to use condoms even when they are undetectable to protect themselves from other sexually transmitted infections.



# 4 STAGES OF HIV INFECTION/HIV DISEASE PROCESS

## ACUTE HIV INFECTION

The first stage begins with flu-like symptoms. This happens 2-4 weeks after someone is exposed. Please note that these symptoms alone do not determine if you have an HIV diagnosis, the only way to know for sure is to complete an HIV test.

## ASYMPTOMATIC INFECTION

HIV may not show physical symptoms in the body for up to 10 to 15 years, depending on your health and age, etc., after being exposed to HIV. HIV cells continue to reproduce in your body and pose a greater risk for others to be exposed to HIV infection as well as creating major internal organ problems if you do not get diagnosed early.

***While you may not feel sick, you can still spread HIV to others.***

## SYMPTOMATIC HIV INFECTION

HIV continues to multiply in the body and has largely destroyed the body's immune system which leaves it defenseless against other diseases. At this stage most people are experiencing side effects from opportunistic infections, including, weight loss, persistent cough, and chronic diarrhea. HIV will likely be transmitted to others if the infected person engages in risky behaviors. Without treatment, chronic HIV can become AIDS.

## AIDS (ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME)

This is the last stage of HIV infection. The immune system cannot fight off all the infections that are usually easy for it to overcome. People are diagnosed with AIDS if they have a CD4 count less than 200 cells/ mm or if they have certain opportunistic infections. HIV medicines can help people at this stage, but without treatment, people with AIDS usually only live 3 to 5 years.

# Nutrition

Nutrition is important for everyone because food provides the body nutrients it needs to stay healthy and grow. There are six types of nutrients and we need each of them to have a healthy diet.

Protein | Carbohydrates  
Fat | Vitamins | Minerals  
Water

# Oral Health

The mouth is sometimes the first part of the body to be affected by HIV. People with HIV are at high risk for oral health problems and almost all adults with HIV will have a problem with their oral health at some point.

Common HIV-related oral health problems are dry mouth, thrush, oral hairy leukoplakia, mouth ulcers, including canker sores, cold sores (Herpes simplex virus).

Dental problems can be painful and cause trouble chewing or swallowing. Sometimes this makes a person skip their medication or avoid eating. The best prevention is to visit your dentist at least once a year. If you don't have a dentist, ask your provider for a referral. Brush and floss your teeth twice daily.

Tell your provider if you have dry mouth.