



HIV/AIDS Treatments

October 2007

Education & Resource Centre (ERC)

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Open times
Monday–Thursday
9:30am to 4:30pm

1. HIV Treatment

Types of Treatment
How Treatment Works
The Impact of Taking HIV Treatments

2. Side Effects of HIV Drugs

3. Complementary Therapies

4. Recreational Drugs

5. New Drug Treatments

6. Things to Remember

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1) HIV Treatment

Drug treatments offer many people living with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), a chance to control the virus and stay healthy for much longer. Improved treatment options have had a huge impact on the lives of people with HIV and those who care for them, through reductions in AIDS related illnesses, admissions to hospital and death rates. Antiretroviral drugs have enabled most people with HIV to continue to work, lead active lives and plan for the future.

When to commence treatment is usually determined by the person living with HIV/AIDS in consultation with their doctor. They need to consider the person's current health and quality of life in addition to the amount of HIV in the blood (HIV Viral Load) and immune function (CD4 count).

Types of treatment

The current standard of drug treatment for HIV is known as highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART). In this document we refer to these drugs as *antiretrovirals*. Four groups of drugs are commonly used in constructing a suitable combination for treatment:

- Nucleoside & nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs)
- Non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs)
- Protease inhibitors
- Binding & fusion inhibitors



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Usually, three different drugs from at least two of these groups are taken together. Some tablets now contain two or three different active drugs. The advantages of these combination drugs are the reduction of the number of tablets per day and increased convenience.

How treatment works

Current treatment for HIV is unable to remove HIV from the body, however it controls the virus by stopping it from making copies of itself inside the cells of the body. Treatments interfere with the chemicals that the virus uses to make new copies of HIV. It is important to remember that it is still possible to pass on HIV (through unprotected sex or sharing needles) even when taking antiretrovirals.

After starting treatment a person's virus may become resistant to the drugs they are using, which means that they won't work as well or at all. This usually occurs when antiretroviral drugs are taken irregularly, or when there are frequent late or missed doses. If you become resistant, the treatment may have to be changed to a different combination of drugs. Resistant HIV is harder to treat. Making sure that treatment is taken at the correct time reduces the risk of drug resistance.

People taking antiretrovirals will need to take them for the rest of their lives. Stopping drug treatment, even for short periods of time, may cause the virus to become resistant to those drugs. There is now good evidence to say that interruptions to treatment lead to worse outcomes. In a recent major study, interruptions were associated with higher rates of illnesses and even death compared to people who continued drug treatment.

Drug treatment does not work well for everyone. Even when it is working well, it cannot cure HIV.

The impact of taking HIV treatment

Antiretrovirals are usually taken in tablet form. The tablets have to be taken at the right times. Some tablets have to be kept in the fridge and some cannot be taken with certain kinds of food, so the person with HIV has to be very organised about remembering to take tablets and fitting them in with their lifestyle.

Tablets may have to be taken in public, such as at work. Some combinations of drugs may be more suitable if they don't need to be taken during working hours.

It is important for people taking antiretrovirals to have a check-up with a doctor every three months. They need to have regular blood tests to make sure that the treatment is working and that it is not having serious side effects. A regular check up also provides an opportunity to have a general health check (e.g. sexual health check, blood pressure, cholesterol).



2) Side Effects of HIV Drugs

Many people taking antiretrovirals for HIV have experienced some side effects, some of which occur early and generally resolve within the first couple of weeks and others which develop later. However, much has been learnt in the past decade about how to manage these side effects. If a person does experience side effects, their doctor may recommend a different combination of drugs that are more suitable. It is important to discuss potential side effects of your drugs with your doctor before starting – knowing what to expect is often very helpful.

Some of the most common side effects are:

- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Diarrhoea
- Tiredness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Headaches
- Peripheral neuropathy (problems with the nerves in the legs, such as pain or tingling)
- Skin rashes
- Lipodystrophy (changes in the way body fat is distributed around the body).

3) Complementary therapies

Some people with HIV use other types of therapy, either alone or with their antiretrovirals. Some of the more popular complementary therapies are:

- Vitamin and mineral supplements
- Massage
- Meditation
- Herbal remedies
- Traditional Chinese Medicine
- Acupuncture

Just like conventional medicines, complementary therapies may have unwanted side effects. People taking antiretrovirals for HIV have to be careful as some antiretroviral drugs interact unfavourably with complementary therapies. This means there could be increased or decreased amounts in the blood of either the antiretroviral drug or the complementary therapy. Both the HIV doctor and the complementary therapist need to know what the other is prescribing.



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4) Recreational drugs

People taking antiretrovirals may sometimes use recreational drugs such as marijuana, speed, crystal meth ... etc. It is important to raise this with your doctor as some antiretrovirals can have potentially dangerous interactions with some recreational drugs.

5) New drug treatments

New drugs are being developed all the time. Trials of these treatments are being conducted in specialist HIV/AIDS treatment and research centres.

6) Things to remember

- Deciding to take treatment is a big lifestyle decision. Take your time to think through the issues.
- Discuss treatment with your doctor and with other HIV positive people.
- Improved HIV treatments have helped to reduce the incidence of AIDS and related deaths.
- Antiretrovirals can cause problems and may be less effective for some people.
- Treatment does not prevent the virus from being passed to other people.

7) Services

Medical Treatment

Specialist clinics

Infectious Diseases Outpatient Clinic The Alfred Hospital Commercial Rd Prahran. 3181 Phone: 9076 6081 www.hivhepsti.info	Monash Medical Centre Infectious Diseases Unit 246 Clayton Road Clayton. 3168 Phone: 9594 4564
Victorian Infectious Diseases Unit HIV Service – Outpatients Clinic 9th Floor Royal Melbourne Hospital Grattan St Parkville. 3050 Telephone 9342 7212 Email vids@mh.org.au www.mh.org.au/vids/	Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Referral Clinic 580 Swanston St Carlton. 3051 Phone: 9341 6214 Freecall 1800 032 7000 www.mshc.org .



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GP Clinics

<p>Carlton Clinic 88 Rathdowne Street (near cnr Elgin St) Carlton. 3053 Phone: 9347 9422 Email: lee.schleger@symbionmc.com www.carltonclinic.com.au</p>	<p>Centre Clinic (VAC) Darebin Community Health Service 42 Separation St Northcote. 3070 Phone: 9481 7155 www.vicaids.asn.au</p>
<p>Prahran Market Clinic 131 Commercial Rd Prahran. 3181 Phone: 9826 4500 Email: prahranclinic@bigpond.com.au</p>	<p>Centre Clinic (VAC) Rear 77 Fitzroy Street (above Guardian Chemist) St. Kilda. 3182 Phone: 9525 5866 www.vicaids.asn.au</p>
<p>Middle Park Clinic 41 Armstrong Street Middle Park. 320 Phone: 9699 4626 mpc@idx.com.au</p>	

For further information on HIV/AIDS Treatments contact:

<p>People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) Victoria 6 Claremont St, South Yarra. 3141 Phone: 9865 6772 Email: plwhavic@netspace.net.au</p>	<p>Victorian AIDS Council 6 Claremont St South Yarra. 3141 Phone: 9865 6700 Freecall: 1800 134840 www.vicaids.asn.au</p>
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Counselling/Support Services

Most of the services listed below work not only with HIV positive clients, but also their partners, family and friends. These agencies charge no or minimal fees.

<p>Positive Counselling at Williams Rd. Family Therapy Centre 3 Williams Rd Windsor. 3181 Phone: 9530 2311 Email: info@positivecounselling.org.au www.positivecounselling.org.au</p>	<p>Victorian AIDS Council 6 Claremont St South Yarra. 3141 Phone: 9865 6700 Freecall: 1800 134840 www.vicaids.asn.au</p>
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HIV/AIDS TREATMENTS

<p>HIV Social Work Team The Alfred Commercial Rd Prahran. 3181 Phone: 9076 3026</p>	<p>Positive Living Centre (Victorian AIDS Council) 51 Commercial Rd Prahran. 3181. Phone: 9863 0444 Freecall: 1800 622795 Email: plc@vicaids.asn.au www.vicaids.asn.au</p>
<p>Education and Resource Centre (HIV, Hepatitis and STIs), The Alfred, Fairfield House, Moubray Street, Prahran. 3181 Phone: 9076 6993 Email: erc@alfred.org.au www.hivhepsti.info</p>	<p>Victorian HIV Consultancy The Alfred Commercial Road Prahran. 3181 Phone: 9076 3658 <i>Provides a small multidisciplinary team with a state-wide brief, supporting the continuing care & end-of-life care needs of PLWHA.</i></p>
<p>People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) Victoria 6 Claremont St, South Yarra. 3141 Phone: 9865 6772 Email: plwhavic@netspace.net.au</p>	<p>Haemophilia Foundation Victoria Suite 5 Ground Floor 860 Nepean Hwy, Hampton East. 3188 Phone: 9555 7595</p>
<p>Straight Arrows Fairfield House The Alfred Hospital Moubray St Prahran. 3181 Phone: 9076 3792 Fax 9076 3817 Email: sarrows@bigpond.net.au www.straightarrows.org.au</p>	<p>Positive Women Fairfield House The Alfred Hospital Moubray Street, Prahran. 3181 Phone: 9076 6918 Fax: 9076 6092 E-mail : info@positivewomen.org.au www.positivewomen.org.au</p>



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For information about rural services in Victoria contact:

<p>Breaking the Chains Phone: Jeffrey on 5562 8216 Glen on 5561 6257 <i>A Warrnambool and district support and education group for HIV or Hepatitis C positive people, their friends, families and supporters</i></p>	<p>Country Awareness Network (CAN) 34 Myers Street Bendigo. 3552 Phone: 5443 8355 Email: can@can.org.au www.can.org.au</p>
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Useful Websites

<p>Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) www.vicaids.asn.au</p>	<p>Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) www.afao.org.au</p>
<p>Project Inform <i>National community-based organisation from the U.S.</i> www.projinf.org</p>	<p>The Body <i>A service of Body Health Resources Corporation (New York)</i> www.thebody.com</p>
<p>Education and Resource Centre (HIV, Hepatitis and STIs), The Alfred. www.hivhepsti.info</p>	

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Acknowledgement

This fact sheet was compiled with the contribution of a number of staff from The Alfred and external agencies, service providers and support organisations. The ERC would like to thank you all for your time and effort.

Disclaimer

This information is provided for educational purposes only and is done so without liability or recourse. This information is not intended to replace professional health care advice. We strongly recommend that you discuss any issues concerning your health and treatment with your health care provider before taking action or relying on the information.