

TALK ABOUT antiretrovirals

Advice from people with HIV about life-saving medicines



TAC
TREATMENT ACTION CAMPAIGN

treat
200 000
by 2006

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What are antiretrovirals (ARVs)?

We are all people living with HIV. Many of us are taking ARVs. These are medicines that treat AIDS. They can save your life, but they are not a cure. You must take them every day for the rest of your life. ARVs are now available in some public clinics and hospitals.

● Thabo Cele

How do ARVs work?

They reduce the amount of the virus in my blood. This helps my immune system to work properly again and fight off infections that make people with HIV sick. I weighed 42kg when I started ARVs. I was close to death. Now I weigh over 60kg and am working and healthy. To meet the challenges of HIV, we must take responsibility to learn about the disease and become treatment-literate. It is not only our doctors and nurses who must understand our medical needs. We must understand them too.

Nontsikelelo Zwedala ●



How do I tell when I need to start taking ARVs?

I was diagnosed with HIV in 2002, when I was very sick. It was a relief, because then I knew what was causing my illnesses. I also got counselling before and after I was tested. Next I had a test which measured how many CD4 cells I had. These cells control your immune system. Healthy people usually have over 800 CD4 cells per drop of blood. When you have about 200 CD4 cells or you are sick with AIDS, you should consider taking ARVs. Everyone is different, and this can take many years. I started when my CD4 count was 91. I am much healthier now.

● Lilhle Dlamini



Do ARVs work for everyone?

No. Some people start too late and their immune system cannot recover. They start becoming sick with AIDS again. However, ARVs do work for the vast majority of people who become sick with AIDS. It is important to get tested early and have your CD4 cells counted.

Isaac Skosana ●



How do you take ARVs?

For lifelong treatment, you must take three different ARV medicines together. This is called combination therapy or HAART. Sometimes you can take one pill containing all three ARVs twice a day. But often you have to take more than one pill.

● Zackie Achmat



Why is it important to take ARVs on time everyday for life?

If you miss doses regularly, the virus will learn to defeat the ARVs sooner. This is called resistance.

Alude Shongwe ●



I have heard of first-line and second-line regimens. What are these?

My doctor explained that even when you take ARVs correctly, the virus can change its form. Then your clinic or doctor needs to change the combination of medicines you first started taking (first-line regimen) to a different combination of ARVs (second-line regimen). If you take your medicines incorrectly, you may have to start your second line regimen sooner. It's better to make your first-line regimen last as long as possible.

● Leon van den Heever



Do ARVs work for children with AIDS?

Yes. Children usually take smaller doses than adults. Instead of taking pills, they might take the ARVs as a syrup, which is often easier for them. Generally, children progress from HIV infection to AIDS quicker than adults, so they need to start ARVs sooner. Consult your doctor to help you decide what is best for you child.





I am pregnant. Can I still take ARVs?

Yes, but you must inform the doctor or nurse because not all ARVs should be taken by pregnant women, or women who might get pregnant. For example, a very commonly used and good ARV called efavirenz should not be used by pregnant women. Pregnant women taking an ARV called nevirapine as part of their treatment should be monitored closely for liver problems. My child is HIV-negative because we took nevirapine when he was born.

● Busisiwe and Luthando Maqungo

Why can't I share my ARVs with other people in my family who need them?

Because both you and your family member will be taking too small a dose and the medicines will stop working for both of you. Also, you cannot take ARVs if you are not receiving proper monitoring from a doctor or nurse.

Faghmeda Miller ●



If I take ARVs, do I still need to take any other medicines?

People with HIV get sick with diseases called opportunistic infections. They are more likely to get TB and they also get unusual diseases like systemic thrush (severe fungal infections of the throat, stomach or vagina), cryptococcal meningitis (infection of the brain caused by a fungus) and PCP pneumonia. ARVs do not treat these diseases. You have to take other medicines to treat them. However, ARVs strengthen your immune system and reduce the risk of you getting these diseases.

● Vuyani Jacobs

I take traditional remedies. Can I continue taking them with ARVs?

I am a traditional healer. I believe in traditional remedies but I also take ARVs. Traditional remedies are chemicals, just like medicines. Some of them can have negative effects if combined with ARVs. This is called drug interaction. We don't know how some traditional medicines affect the immune systems of people with HIV. If you take traditional medicines, tell your doctor, especially if you take ARVs. Make sure your traditional healer knows about HIV and how ARVs work.

Prudence Mabele ●



Can a healthy diet take the place of ARVs?

No. But people with HIV, whether or not they take ARVs, need to eat well to give the immune system the energy it needs to fight the virus. Be careful of people who claim that particular foods such as garlic or African potato treat AIDS. There is no food that is known to treat AIDS. Eat normal healthy foods. Try to drink as little alcohol as possible or none at all. Smoking is not good for people with HIV because of the chest diseases we are more likely to get.

● Nokhwezi Hoboyi

I do not have enough money to buy food. What can I do?

You must apply for a social grant. People with AIDS are entitled to a disability grant. You should find out what grants you are entitled to by contacting your local Social Welfare Department office, church, trade union, or Black Sash office. They can help. Join the campaign for a basic income grant!

John Vollenhoven ●



What support do I need if I go onto treatment?

I belong to a support group where we talk about living with HIV/AIDS. I have a treatment supporter, my mother, who helps remind me to take my medicines. A friend can also be a good treatment supporter. You can also talk to your treatment supporter when you get depressed. Being open about your status makes it much easier to deal with HIV. Most importantly, take personal responsibility for taking your medicines and understanding them.

● Gugu Mpungose

If I take ARVs do I still need to use a condom when I have sex?

Definitely. You can still transmit the virus if you have vaginal or anal intercourse. Also, you could be re-infected with a different variation of the virus that is resistant to your medicines. So you must wear a condom to prevent this. People with HIV can have healthy sex lives if we practice safer sex.

Ntombozuko Khwaza ●





How often must I visit my clinic?

I visit my clinic regularly. Every six months I have a CD4 test and a viral load test to count the viruses in my blood. The nurse also gives me other blood tests to check for side-effects. I know the medicines are working because I feel better and the results of my blood tests are good.

● Thobani Ncapai

What is adherence?

My doctor explained how the medicines work, the importance of adherence, as well as the side-effects that may occur during the first few months. Adherence means taking your medicines on time, everyday. I experienced some side-effects so I reported them to my care-giver and was put on a different combination of ARVs. Then the side-effects went away. Now I take AZT, lamivudine and efavirenz. I had thrush and other infections before I started ARVs, but now I am healthy. My CD4 count has gone up to over 900.

Ntombi Mbuthu ●



Is it true that ARVs are toxic or dangerous?

All strong medicines, like ARVs, have side-effects. Many people have some minor side-effects when they begin treatment. Usually these go away after a few weeks. A few people have serious side-effects that in rare circumstances can cause death. They either must stop taking the medicines completely or change to different ARVs. It is important to tell your doctor or nurse about any side-effects you experience.

● Judy Seidman

Most ARVs can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and changes in the way your body fat is distributed. You should tell your doctor or nurse immediately when you experience side-effects.

Public clinics and hospitals offering ARV treatment

Eastern Cape

Dora Nginza Hospital
Uitenhage Hospital
Frere Hospital
Cecilia Makiwane Hospital
Umtata General Hospital
St. Elizabeth Hospital
St. Lucy's Hospital
Rietvlei Hospital
Umlamli-Empilisweni Hospital
Frontier Hospital
Settlers Hospital

Free State

National Hospital
Bongani Hospital
Mofumahadi Manapo Mopeli Hospital
Itumeleng Clinic
Metsimaholo Hospital

Gauteng

Helen Joseph Hospital
Coronation Hospital
Discoverer Clinic
Johannesburg Hospital
Hillbrow Clinic
Chris Hani-Baragwanath Hospital
Zola Clinic
Lillian Ngoyi Clinic
Leratong Hospital
Carletonville Hospital
Khutsong Main Clinic
Natalespruit Hospital
Themba Hospital
Far East Rand Hospital
Daveyton Main Clinic

Kopanong Hospital
Sebokeng Hospital
Empilisweni Clinic
Pretoria Academic Hospital
Kalafong Hospital
Laudium Clinic
Dr. George Mukhari Hospital
Soshanguve III Clinic

KwaZulu-Natal

King Edward VIII Hospital
RK Khan Hospital
Prince Mshiyeni Hospital
Addington Hospital
Mahatma Gandhi Hospital
Greys Hospital
Northdale Hospital
Edendale Hospital
Madadeni Hospital
Newcastle Hospital
Church of Scotland Hospital
CJ Memorial Hospital
Dundee Hospital
Stanger Hospital
Ngwelezane Hospital
Lower Umfolozi Memorial Hospital
Mseleni Hospital
Hlabisa Hospital
Bethesda Hospital
Manguzi Hospital
Mosvold Hospital
Ladysmith Hospital
Estcourt Hospital
Benedictine Hospital
Nkonjeni Hospital
Vryheid Hospital
Murchison Hospital
CJ Crookes Hospital

Port Shepstone Hospital
Christ the King Hospital
St. Apollonaris Hospital
Kokstad Hospital

Limpopo

Polokwane Hospital
Mankweng Hospital
Tshilidzini Hospital
Siloam Hospital
Letaba Hospital
Mapulaneng Hospital
St. Ritas Hospital
Mokopane Hospital
Embhuleni Hospital

Mpumalanga

Evander Hospital
Embhuleni Hospital
Piet Retief Hospital
Bethal Hospital
Rob Ferreira Hospital
Tonga Hospital
Shongwe Hospital
Themba Hospital
Philadelphia Hospital
KwaMhlanga Hospital
Mmamethlake Hospital
Witbank Hospital

Northern Cape

Kimberley Hospital
Kuruman Hospital
Springbok Hospital
De Aar Clinic
Gordonia Hospital

North-West

Klerksdorp / Tshepong Hospital
Mafikeng / Bophelong Hospital
Rustenburg Hospital
Taung Hospital

Western Cape

Khayelitsha Site B Clinic
Michael Mapongwana Clinic
Nolungile Clinic
Gugulethu Clinic
Tygerberg Hospital
Groote Schuur Hospital
Red Cross Children's Hospital
GF Jooste Hospital
Langa Washington Road Clinic
Hout Bay Main Road Clinic
Masiphumelelo Clinic
Westfleur Hospital
Victoria Hospital
Hottentots Holland Hospital
Tableview Clinic
Eerste Rivier Hospital
Mitchells Plain Clinic
Robbie Nurrock Hospital
Beaufort West Hospital
Mosselbaai Hospital
Knysna Hospital
Cloetesville District Hospital
Paarl (TC Newman) Hospital
Swartland Clinic
Vredendal Hospital
Malmesbury
George Hospital
Hermanus Hospital
Robertson Clinic
Worcester Hospital

This list was compiled from information provided by provincial departments of health.

This pamphlet was issued by the Treatment Action Campaign. Tel: 021 788 3507 or 011 339 8421 Email: info@tac.org.za

Please always consult an accredited antiretroviral care-giver about taking ARVs.

Although great care was taken in compiling this pamphlet, TAC assumes no liability for any errors it might contain.



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