

“ADHERE TO YOUR MEDICATION TO STAY HEALTHY.”

HIV doesn't win
unless you give
it the victory.”

- SEYRAM
HIV Case Manager
Life Relief Foundation, Takoradi

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT LIVING WITH HIV AND HIV MEDICATIONS

QUESTION

What can I do to live a long, healthy life with HIV?

ANSWERS

- You can live a longer and healthier life if you start antiretroviral treatment (ART) as soon as possible. Adhering to it as part of your everyday routine is the best way of ensuring that your immune system stays strong.
- Exercising regularly, eating well, getting enough rest and quality sleep are all vital to maintaining your health.
- Your mental wellbeing is just as important as your physical health. Talking about your concerns with family, friends or a support group can help.
- If you're having problems taking your HIV drugs, talk to your health care provider as soon as possible to get help and support.

QUESTION

Do the antiretroviral medications have side effects?

ANSWERS

As with all medications, starting to take antiretrovirals (ARVs) can cause some side effects.

Some of the common side effects include:

- Loss of appetite
- Dry mouth
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Rash
- Pain
- Trouble sleeping
- Mood changes, depression, and anxiety

Talk to your health care provider about possible side effects and ways to manage them.

Remember, HIV drugs reduce the amount of virus in the body of someone with HIV. This keeps the immune system strong enough to fight off disease.

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BENEFITS OF STAYING IN HIV CARE AND ON ANTI-RETROVIRAL TREATMENT



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You have a choice.

Treatment is never a one-size fits all. Your health care provider can help you make informed choices about what works for you. For example, what medication to take, how to eat healthy, exercise, and know your viral load.



You can have safer sex.

Staying on treatment reduces the amount of HIV in your blood (known as your “viral load”). Having an undetectable viral load greatly reduces your chance of transmitting the virus to your sexual partner(s). Always practice safer sex by using a condom.



You can have a family.

Options are available for people living with HIV who want to be parents. Talk to your health care provider about your plans for having children.



You can live life to the fullest.

Staying in care and on treatment will help you live a longer and healthy life. It will also help prevent transmitting HIV to your unborn child.




You have hope.

Know that HIV care and treatment works. Keep doing the things you love, and if things get tough, seek support from your loved ones and your health care provider. HIV does not define you.

Adapted from 5 Positives to HIV Care + Treatment. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Publication ID 38087 <https://npiin.cdc.gov/publication/5-positives-hiv-care-treatment> Accessed March 30, 2020

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**“I AM
ENJOYING
A HEALTHY
LIFE.**

**My viral load is
undetectable.
My HIV is
untransmittable.”**

MR. THOMPSON
80 years old. Living with HIV since 2005
Takoradi

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR VIRAL LOAD AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE UNDETECTABLE

QUESTION

What is viral load?

ANSWER

Viral load refers to the amount of HIV in a person's blood.

QUESTION

How can my viral load be undetectable (meaning that the virus isn't showing up on blood tests)?

ANSWER

Your viral load can only be undetectable if you stick to the HIV treatment prescribed by your health care provider.

Note: Having an undetectable viral load also means that you cannot transmit HIV to your sexual partner(s) and unborn children. However, it does not prevent pregnancy or reduce your risk of other sexually transmitted infections. You should always practice safe sex (use a condom), even with an undetectable viral load.

QUESTION

If my viral load is undetectable, can I stop taking my medications?

ANSWER

No, you must continue taking your medication. Remaining on treatment is key to staying undetectable.

If you stop taking your medications, then HIV will start its impact on your immune system, your health may worsen and your risk of passing on HIV increases. Further, not adhering to the treatment regime prescribed by your health care provider increases the amount of HIV in your blood and the chances of the virus becoming drug-resistant.

QUESTION

How often should I have my viral load tested?

ANSWER

A basic guide is every 3 to 6 months. Speak with your health care provider to determine what's best for you.

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“GET TESTED FOR HIV.”

If positive, there is treatment.

If negative,

- Continue to stay safe
- Abstain from sex
- Use condoms
- Be faithful.”

- EBENEZER
HIV Case Manager
Takoradi

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR HIV TEST RESULTS AND PREVENTING HIV

QUESTION

How can I tell if I have HIV? Are there symptoms?

ANSWER

Many people who have HIV don't have any symptoms at all for many years. The only way to know if you're infected is to get tested.

QUESTION

What if I test positive for HIV?

ANSWER

If you've received news that you've tested positive for HIV, it's normal if you feel shocked, confused or upset. It is important to take a bit of time to get your head around the news. There are HIV services available to persons living with HIV in Ghana. Talk to your health care provider and adhere to your treatment plans.

If you are diagnosed with HIV, one of the first steps you should take is to start treatment immediately. Why? We know that treatment keeps your immune system healthy and reduces the risk of developing health conditions associated with HIV.

QUESTION

Can condoms prevent HIV?

ANSWER

When used consistently and correctly, condoms are very good at stopping the spread of HIV during sex.

Condoms continue to provide one of the most effective ways to prevent HIV and many sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Using condoms is an easy way to prevent the transmission of fluids passing from one partner to another, which is how infection can spread.

**“GET
TESTED.
KNOW
YOUR HIV
STATUS.**

I KNOW MINE

**Let's end AIDS in
Ghana by 2030.”**

- AUNTIE CECE
Executive Director
Life Relief Foundation, Takoradi

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HIV AND AIDS

QUESTION :

What is HIV?

ANSWER

HIV stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**. HIV is a virus spread through certain body fluids that attacks the body's immune system.

The human body can't get rid of HIV completely. Once you get HIV, you have it for life. However, there is treatment available and if you take it every day, you can live a long, healthy life.

QUESTION

What is AIDS?

ANSWER

AIDS stands for **Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome**. AIDS is the most severe phase of HIV infection. People with AIDS have such badly damaged immune systems that they get an increasing number of severe illnesses, called opportunistic illnesses. HIV and AIDS are not the same thing. Being HIV-positive does not necessarily mean you have or will have AIDS.

QUESTION

How is HIV transmitted?

ANSWER

You can get or transmit HIV only through:

- Having vaginal or anal sex with someone who has HIV without using a condom and lubricants
- Sharing needles or syringes
- Mother/woman living with HIV to child during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding
- Receiving blood transfusions

You **CANNOT** get or transmit HIV through:

- mosquitoes, ticks, or other insect bites.
- Saliva, tears, or sweat that is not mixed with the blood of an HIV-positive person
- Hugging, shaking hands, sharing toilets, sharing dishes, and touching

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“START TREATMENT AND ADHERE TO YOUR TREATMENT PLAN.

You can live a long
and healthy life with
HIV.”

- GERTRUDE
HIV Case Manager
Life Relief Foundation, Takoradi

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR POSITIVE HIV TEST RESULT.

WHAT TO EXPECT AND NEXT STEPS.



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What if my HIV test result is positive?

This isn't the result you wanted, and you may feel worried, but don't panic.

There are good treatments available. If you take your medication every day correctly, you can live a long and healthy life.

Also, the medications will:

- help prevent you from getting AIDS — the most advanced stage of HIV infection — and other HIV-related illnesses.
- greatly reduce the risk that you will pass HIV to other people and your unborn child.

You can and should monitor the amount of virus in your blood/body (known as your viral load) and if it is low (undetectable), you cannot transmit HIV to your sexual partner(s).

You can remain healthy for many years after you test positive if you are on treatment.

- The first step after testing positive is to see your health care provider, even if you don't feel sick.
- Remember, if you have HIV, it does not mean that you will get AIDS.
- Your health care provider will discuss with you how to get in care, stay in care, and live well.

Adapted from Understanding Your HIV Test Results: What They Mean to You. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/stophivtogether/library/hiv-screening-standard-care/brochures/cdc-lsht-hsse-brochure-understanding-your-test-results.pdf> Accessed March 30, 2020

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