

# Adhering To My HIV Treatment Regimen

## What should I do before I begin treatment?

Before you begin an HIV treatment regimen, there are several steps you can take to help you with **adherence**:

- Talk with your doctor about your treatment regimen.
- Get a written copy of your treatment plan that lists each medication, when and how much to take, and if it must be taken with food or on an empty stomach.
- Understand how important adherence is (see [Adherence Fact Sheet](#)).
- Be honest about personal issues that may affect your adherence. Adherence may be harder for people dealing with substance abuse or alcoholism, unstable housing, mental illness, or other life challenges.
- Consider a "dry run." Practice your treatment regimen using vitamins, jelly beans, or mints. This will help you determine ahead of time which doses might be difficult to take correctly.
- Develop a plan that works for you.

Many people find it helpful to identify the activities they normally do at the times they will be taking their medication. People who arrange their medication schedule around their daily routines adhere to their treatment plans better than those who do not.

## How can I maintain adherence after I start treatment?

- Take your medication at the same time each day.
- Put a week's worth of medication in a pill box at the beginning of each week.
- Use timers, alarm clocks, or pagers to remind you when to take your medication.
- Keep your medication in the place where you will take it. You may want to keep backup supplies of your medication at your workplace or in your briefcase or purse.

### *Term Used in This Fact Sheet:*

**Adherence:** how closely you follow, or adhere to, your treatment regimen. This includes taking the correct dose at the correct time as prescribed by your doctor.

- Keep a medication diary. Write the names of your drugs in your daily planner, then check off each dose as you take it.
- Plan ahead for weekends, holidays, and changes in routine.
- Develop a support network of family members, friends, or coworkers who can remind you to take your medication. Some people also find it helpful to join a support group for people living with HIV infection.
- Monitor your medication supply. Contact your doctor or clinic if your supply will not last until your next visit.

## What should I do if I have problems adhering to my treatment regimen?

It is important that you tell your doctor right away about any problems you are having with your treatment plan. If you are experiencing unpleasant side effects, your dose may need to be adjusted or you may need a change in your regimen (see [Changing Regimen Fact Sheet](#) for more information about changing your treatment regimen). Missed doses may be a sign that your treatment plan is too complicated or unrealistic for you to follow. Talk with your doctor about other treatment options. Your doctor needs to stay informed to help you get the most out of your treatment regimen and to provide workable treatment options.

### **For more information:**

Contact your doctor or an *AIDSinfo* Health Information Specialist at 1-800-448-0440 or <http://aidsinfo.nih.gov>.