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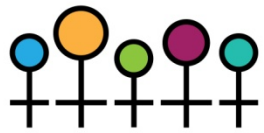
Considerations Before Starting HIV Treatment

Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

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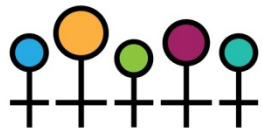


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Considerations Before Starting HIV Treatment

- If you're living with HIV, **treatment with HIV drugs can improve your quality of life** and help you stay healthier longer
- ***Starting treatment is a big decision***

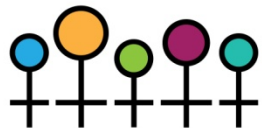




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Preparing for HIV Treatment

- To get the most benefit from HIV drugs, they **must be used exactly the way they are prescribed**
- Taking your treatment correctly is as important as which drugs you and your health care provider choose
- Before getting started, Be prepared!
 - **The right health care provider**
 - **Enough knowledge about HIV**
 - **A positive attitude**

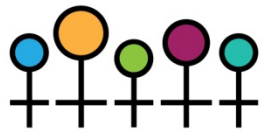


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Starting Sooner Rather than Later

The results of a recent study (**the START trial**) have definitively shown:

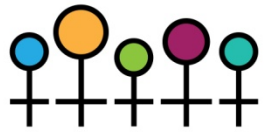
- **People living with HIV who start treatment early, while CD4 counts are still high, have a much lower risk of illness and death**
 - Including people living with HIV who may have no outward signs of ill health
- Taking HIV drugs earlier reduced likelihood of developing AIDS-related *and* non-AIDS related illnesses



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The START Trial

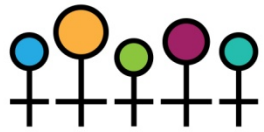
- While experts long debated benefits/risks of starting HIV treatment while people are relatively healthy, START trial made it clear that **benefits of starting early outweigh any potential risks**
- Scientific experts and policy makers came together in July 2015
 - Issued statement declaring all people living with HIV should have access to HIV treatment as soon as they're diagnosed



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Benefits of Starting Early

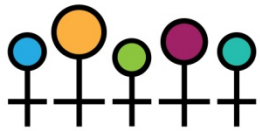
- Having a higher baseline CD4 cell count, keeping it high
- Preventing further damage to the immune system
- Decreasing risk for HIV-related and non-HIV-related health problems
- Reducing risk of transmitting HIV to others (known as ***Treatment as Prevention or TasP***):
 - Sexual partners
 - Babies



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Risks of Starting Late

- Severely weakened immune system
 - Can take longer to restore immune system to full strength
 - Delaying treatment can increase chances that people living with HIV will develop AIDS and other serious illnesses
- Transmitting HIV to others, including sexual partners and babies (if you become pregnant)



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HIV Treatment Guidelines

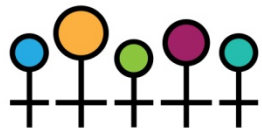
- Issued by a variety of global and country-based agencies
 - Written and reviewed regularly by HIV experts
- Guidelines on starting HIV treatment:
 - **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS):** All people living with HIV should take HIV drugs, no matter what their CD4 count
 - **World Health Organization:** Recent guidelines issued in September 2015 also recommend all people living with HIV should take HIV drugs, no matter what their CD4 count
 - **As of October 2015:** All internationally-written guidelines in agreement, including DHHS, WHO, BHIVA (British HIV Association), EACS (European AIDS Clinical Society)



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The Right Health Care Provider

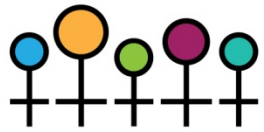
- Starting sooner rather than later is a decision for you to make with your provider, who will look at:
 - **Baseline blood tests**
 - Readiness to start and stick to lifelong treatment
- Are **you and your provider a team?** Ask yourself:
 - Can I be totally honest with them?
 - Are they available when I have questions?
 - Do they take my concerns seriously?
- *If so, great! If not, you may want to make some changes*



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The Right Health Care Provider

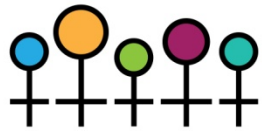
- If you do not feel fully respected or taken seriously, consider talking to your provider or **it may be time to look for another provider**
- Wise to have a health care provider who is an **HIV specialist (treats many people living with HIV)**
- To find HIV specialists near you:
 - Ask for suggestions from friends and/or ASOs
 - Check with the American Academy of HIV Medicine (AAHIVM), HIV Medical Association (HIVMA) or International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care (IAPAC)



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Goals of HIV Treatment

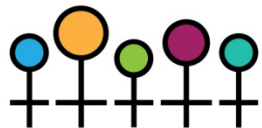
- Get your viral load as low as possible for as long as possible
- Preserve, improve health of immune system by increasing CD4 cells
- Improve quality of life and reduce illness
- To reduce risk of transmitting HIV to others



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Adherence

- Adherence:** Taking drugs on schedule, as prescribed
- To get best benefits from HIV therapy, good adherence is required
 - HIV drugs need to be kept at certain level in your body
 - Skipping doses, not taking drugs on time, not following food requirements can cause drugs to be less effective or stop working



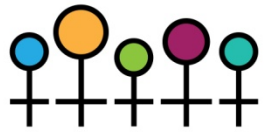
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Resistance

Resistance: When a drug can longer fight HIV effectively

- If viral load goes up while taking HIV drugs, you should have a resistance test
- If your HIV develops resistance, you will likely have to change some drugs in your regimen

The best way to avoid resistance is to take your HIV drugs exactly as directed!

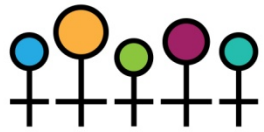


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A Positive Attitude

When considering starting treatment, it's important to have a good attitude and believe that:

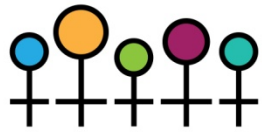
- Starting treatment is the right decision for you
- HIV drugs will help you fight the virus
- You **can** take your medications the right way



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A Positive Attitude

- **Get in touch with why you're starting treatment**
 - To keep yourself in good health – for your own sake, and/or for the good of your family
- You need not wait until your immune system is damaged before taking HIV drugs
- Newer HIV drugs are much better tolerated and have fewer side effects



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A Positive Attitude

*When you consider starting treatment, it's **important not to go it alone***

- Put together a **support system** that may include:
 - Your health care provider
 - Social workers
 - Case managers
 - Family and friends
 - Support group of other people living with HIV
 - Online communities such as The Well Project's *A Girl Like Me!*



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Learn More!

- To learn more about this topic, please read the full fact sheet:
 - [Considerations Before Starting HIV Treatment](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
 - www.thewellproject.org
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.twitter.com/thewellproject