Adherence

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

#onewomanatatime #thewellproject

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Strong Drugs to Fight HIV

Advances in HIV treatment in past 25 years have led to approval of more than 40 HIV drugs – a remarkable accomplishment!

• Using drugs in effective combinations helps many people control their HIV, live longer and healthier lives

• Despite improvements in HIV drug treatment, taking HIV drugs is still a daily, lifelong commitment

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What Is Adherence?

**Adherence:** Taking your drugs *exactly as they are prescribed*

- In order for HIV drugs to do their job properly, you need to do yours!
  - Take correct amount at right times
  - Take drugs as directed

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Importance of Adherence

• Drugs get processed by your body, enter your bloodstream
  – A certain amount of HIV drugs needs to stay in your bloodstream to fight HIV
  – If drug level falls too low, there’s not enough drug to fight HIV
  – Taking pills on schedule keeps the right amount of drug in your body

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Adherence and Resistance

• If you do not take your HIV drugs on schedule
  – Drug levels in your blood will drop
  – HIV will be able to make copies of itself
• When HIV multiplies, viral load increases, CD4 cell count goes down, virus may mutate (change)
• **Resistance:** When HIV mutates, it can survive, even if you’re taking your HIV medication

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• Cross-resistance: resistance to one drug can cause resistance to others you have not taken
• Resistance can affect your treatment choices in the future
• Some studies suggest you need to take your HIV drugs exactly as prescribed about 95% of the time to get the most benefit
  – That means *missing very few doses*
Women living with HIV can face numerous challenges to taking their medicine as prescribed

- Women often put others’ needs before their own
- Other challenges may include:
  - Depression
  - Active substance use or problems with alcohol use
  - Lack of health insurance (women in the US)
  - Lack of safe and stable housing
  - Past or current experience of violence or trauma
  - Other life stressors, such as childcare or parenting issues

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• Despite demands in women’s lives, studies show they are just as likely as men to adhere to HIV regimens
• Important to tell health care provider when you miss doses or don’t take HIV drugs correctly
• (S)he may suggest a change in dosing schedule or drug regimen
  – Newer HIV drugs and combination drugs require fewer pills per day, have fewer food restrictions
Adherence Tips

• Understand that medications help you fight virus, stay well
  – If you don’t think they will, you won’t take your pills correctly
  – If you have doubts, speak to your provider or staff at ASO

• Some women find it helpful to connect their pill-taking with a higher purpose or good intention

• Use a daily activity to remind you to take your pills
  – When it’s time for the activity, it’s also time to take your pills
  – If you have children who take medications or vitamins, take your pills when they take theirs

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Adherence Tips

• If you don’t want others to know, slip away to a bathroom. If you can’t, say the pills are for something else or are vitamins.
• If substance or alcohol use, or depression keep you from taking your medications correctly, talk to your provider, case manager.
• Use tools from your clinic or pharmacy: pillboxes, calendars, diaries, beepers to help you remember to take your medications. Try a smartphone app that sends medication reminders.
• If you remove labels on pill bottles, develop a system to help you remember which HIV drugs to take and when.
• Plan ahead for refills or trips so you do not run out.
Finding Support

• Adherence is hard work
  – *It helps to understand why it is important and to have a support network*

• There are many resources for adherence to HIV drugs

Adherence is key to ensuring that HIV drugs work, maintaining one’s health, keeping one’s viral load undetectable, and preventing transmission
• To learn more about this topic, please read the full fact sheet:
  – Adherence
• 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