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Adherence

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

#onewomanatatime

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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

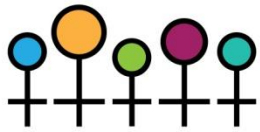
- Drugs get processed by your body, enter your blood stream
 - A certain amount of HIV drugs needs to stay in your blood to fight HIV
 - If drug level falls too low, there's not enough drug to fight HIV
 - Taking pills on schedule keeps the right amount of drug in your body



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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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Adherence and Resistance

- 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*



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Barriers to Adherence for Women

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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Overcoming Barriers

- 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



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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



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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



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Learn More!

- 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