



thewellproject

Considerations Before Starting HIV Treatment

Last updated: June 13, 2022

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

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

#thewellproject

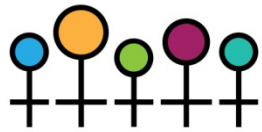


thewellproject

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***





thewellproject

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**

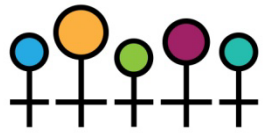


the**well**project

Starting Sooner Rather than Later

The results of a study called **the START trial** have shown once and for all:

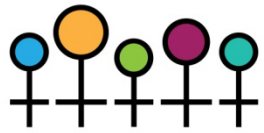
- **People living with HIV who start treatment early, while CD4 counts are still high, have a much lower risk of illness and death**
 - Including people living with HIV who feel well
- Taking HIV drugs earlier reduced likelihood of developing AIDS-related *and* non-AIDS related illnesses



thewellproject

Consensus Statement

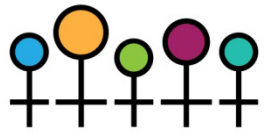
- Scientific experts and policy makers came together in July 2015
 - Issued statement declaring all people living with HIV should have access to HIV treatment as soon as they're diagnosed



thewellproject

Benefits of Starting Early

- A longer life
- Having a higher CD4 cell count and 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 (***Treatment as Prevention or TasP***)
- No risk of transmitting HIV to sexual partners if on treatment and undetectable viral load (***U=U***)



thewellproject

Risks of Starting Late

- A shorter life
- Severely weakened immune system
 - Can take longer to restore immune system to full strength
 - Can increase chances that people living with HIV will develop AIDS and other serious illnesses
- Greater chance of immune reconstitution syndrome
 - Can worsen infections when HIV drugs are started and CD4 count is low
- Passing HIV to others, including sexual partners and babies, if you become pregnant



thewellproject

HIV Treatment Guidelines

- Issued by a variety of global and national 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 their CD4 count
 - **World Health Organization and others:** Since September 2015 also recommend all people living with HIV should take HIV drugs, no matter their CD4 count



thewellproject

The Right Health Care Provider

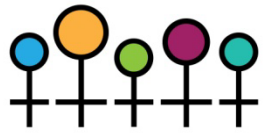
- You and your provider ought to decide together when to start treatment
- Are **you and your provider a team?** Ask yourself:
 - Can I be totally honest with them?
 - Are they available when I have questions?
 - Do they take my concerns seriously?
- **If so, great!**



thewellproject

The Right Health Care Provider

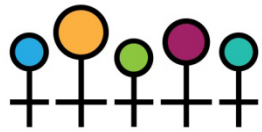
- Not feeling fully respected? Consider talking to your provider or **finding another** (if you are able to choose)
 - Being informed can help you with any provider
- Wise to have a provider who is an **HIV specialist**
- To find HIV specialists near you:
 - Ask for suggestions from friends and/or ASOs
 - American Academy of HIV Medicine (AAHIVM)
 - HIV Medical Association (HIVMA)
 - International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care (IAPAC)



thewellproject

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 the number of CD4 cells
- Improve quality of life and reduce illness
- Reduce risk of transmitting HIV to others

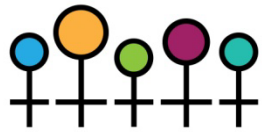


thewellproject

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 a 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



thewellproject

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!

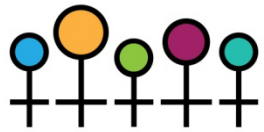


thewellproject

A Positive Attitude

When you think about starting treatment, it's important to have a good attitude. May help to believe that:

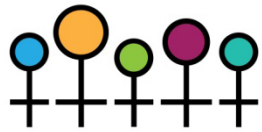
- Starting treatment is the right decision for you
- HIV drugs will help you fight the virus
- You **can** take your medications the right way



thewellproject

A Positive Attitude

- **Think about why you're starting treatment**
 - To keep yourself in good health – for your own sake, and/or for the good of your family, friends, community
- You need not wait until your immune system is damaged before taking HIV drugs
- Newer HIV drugs are much easier on your body and have fewer side effects

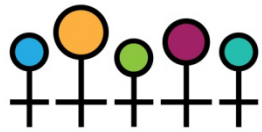


thewellproject

A Positive Attitude

When you think about 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/or friends
 - Support group of other people living with HIV
 - Online communities: The Well Project's *A Girl Like Me*



the**well**project

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