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# Starting HIV Treatment

*Last updated: February 18, 2021*

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

**#onewomanatatime#thewellproject**

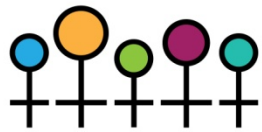
[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

# First Things First



When you and your health care provider decide time is right for you to start treatment ...

*... there are ways to **set yourself up for success***

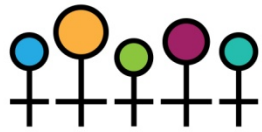


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# First Things First

## *Positive Thinking*

- May be helpful to focus on how:
  - Starting treatment is the right decision for your health
  - HIV drugs will help you fight the virus
  - You can take your medications the right way
- Finding support for your commitment:
  - You don't need to go it alone in sticking to your **treatment regimen**
  - Providers, nurses, social workers, therapists, case managers, support group, online community, family, friends can help

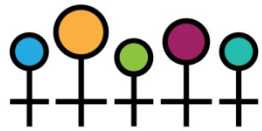


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# First Things First

## Life Issues

- Can be tough to stick with a treatment regimen if you need to work on other issues in your life
- Talk with your provider and get support if you:
  - Feel down a lot of the time and don't enjoy things that you once did – you may be depressed
  - Feel stigmatized or fear stigma
  - Have issues with substance use
  - Are not feeling safe in your home, or are experiencing violence

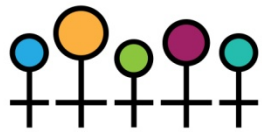


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# Important

*If you are feeling threatened right now, call 911 or the National Domestic Violence hotline in the US at 800-799-SAFE [1-800-799-7233; or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)]. You can also search for a safe space online at Domestic Shelters.*

Domestic Shelters: [www.domesticshelters.org](http://www.domesticshelters.org)



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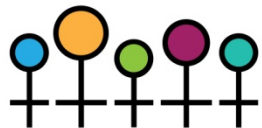
# First Things First

**Health Issues** – talk to your health care provider about:

- Other health problems
- Other drugs you take, including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, street drugs
- Alternative or complementary therapies (herbals) you use
- If you are in any recovery programs

## **Family planning**

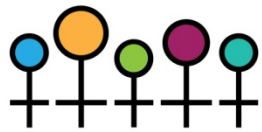
- HIV drugs can interfere with some birth control methods
- Women who are pregnant or plan to become pregnant may want to avoid certain HIV drugs



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# Choosing an HIV Drug Regimen

- 40+ drugs approved for HIV treatment, in 6 classes
  - Entry inhibitors
  - Integrase inhibitors
  - Nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs)
  - Non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs)
  - Protease inhibitors (PIs)
  - Boosting agents
- Experts recommend that in the US, people new to HIV drugs start with a combination that includes an integrase inhibitor and at least one other drug

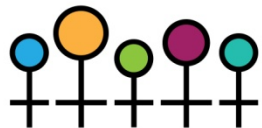


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# Resistance

- When HIV makes copies of itself (reproduces), it can **mutate**
- Some mutations prevent certain HIV drugs from working, causing HIV to become **resistant** to a particular HIV drug
- If resistance occurs, your viral load can increase quickly and you may have to switch drug regimens
- Your provider should do a resistance test to find out if you have drug-resistant HIV before you start HIV treatment



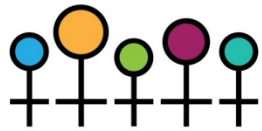


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# Sequencing

One strategy in HIV treatment is to **think ahead**

- Drugs may stop working because of resistance and cross-resistance
- When choosing your regimen, think about which drugs could be used in the future if first HIV drug regimen stops working
- This process is called **sequencing your treatment**
  - Ensures that you will have other treatment options available if resistance develops

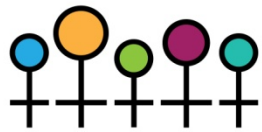


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# Adherence

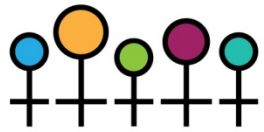
***The best way to prevent resistance is with good adherence!***

- Adherence means taking your HIV drugs exactly as directed
  - Gives drugs the best chance of working well to block HIV reproduction
  - The less HIV can reproduce, the less likely it will develop mutations



# Dosing Schedule

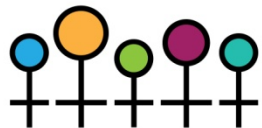
- Questions to ask health care provider:
  - How many pills in a dose? How many drugs in a pill?
  - How many times a day should each dose be taken?
  - Any food requirements?
  - Any drugs/supplements that may interfere with this drug?
- Create a plan:
  - If once-daily regimen, pick an activity to remind you to take HIV drugs like having a cup of coffee in the morning
- If you miss a day, don't take double dose the next day



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# Dosing Schedule

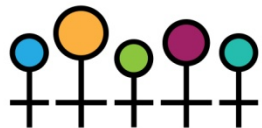
- If you have children, make sure your pill-taking schedule fits in with their routine, but keep your drugs out of their reach
- Plan for weekends/holidays or trips out of town
- Keeping a journal or chart to track how well you are taking your pills
  - Remember that everyone makes mistakes
  - When it happens, start again and commit to staying on track
  - If you start to miss doses regularly, tell your provider



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# Taking Your Pills

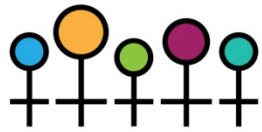
- If no one knows about your HIV status, you may feel like you have to hide your pill taking
  - Can make it harder to take your drugs
  - If you remove the original labels from pill bottles, re-label them in a way that helps you remember what to take and when to take it
- May be a good time to tell the people close to you about your HIV status
- Not ready? Put your meds in a pillbox and tell people you take vitamins/medicine for another condition



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# Side Effects

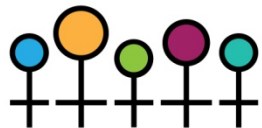
- All HIV drugs have some side effects; ***not all people get them***
- Be prepared: Ask your provider about possible short- and long-term side effects and how to manage them
- If you may need medication to manage side effects, have a supply on hand before starting HIV drugs
- If you are having side effects:
  - Don't stop HIV drugs unless your provider tells you to stop
  - But don't “grin and bear it” – talk to your provider



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# Putting It All Together

- Believe in your ability to stick with your drug regimen
- Important to discuss with health care provider:
  - Other medications
  - Substance use issues
  - Pregnant or plan to get pregnant?
  - Depression, other mental health issues
  - Support system
  - Resistance testing
  - Issues/barriers to taking your drugs on time every day
  - Dosing schedule



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# Learn More!

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