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

#onewomanatatime#thewellproject

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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
**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
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 (disgrace or blame)
  – Have issues with substance use
  – Are not feeling safe in your home, or are experiencing violence
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
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
- People who are pregnant or plan to become pregnant may want to avoid certain HIV drugs

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Choosing an HIV Drug Regimen

- Classes of drugs approved for HIV treatment:
  - Nucleoside/nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs)
  - Non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs)
  - Integrase inhibitors
  - Protease inhibitors (PIs)
  - Entry and fusion inhibitors
  - Attachment inhibitor
  - Post-attachment inhibitor
  - Capsid inhibitor
  - Combination pills
  - Boosting agents

- Some pills include several drugs
Choosing an HIV Drug Regimen

• Many ways to combine drugs
• In US, usually start with an integrase inhibitor plus 1-2 other drugs
• Common regimens to start
  – An Integrase inhibitor + 2 NRTIs
  – A PI + 2 NRTIs [in most cases the PI should be combined, or "boosted"] (may be preferred in certain cases)*;
  – An NNRTI + 2 NRTIs (may be preferred in certain cases)
• Different recommendations if person had long-acting cabotegravir injected to prevent HIV acquisition, but acquired HIV anyway
• When HIV makes copies of itself, it can **mutate**
• Mutations may cause HIV to become **resistant** to a drug
• If that happens, viral load can increase quickly
• Provider should do a **resistance test** before starting treatment
• Resistance testing is recommended for people who:
  – have just been diagnosed with HIV
  – are starting HIV drugs
  – are switching treatment and viral load is over 1,000 copies
  – have a viral load over 1,000 copies

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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
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
• 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 your HIV drugs, like having a cup of coffee in the morning
  – If twice daily, pick a second activity to remember 2nd dose

• If you miss a day, don’t take double dose the next day
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

• Keep a journal or chart, or use a reminder app on your phone 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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• 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
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:
  1. Other medications
  2. Substance use issues
  3. Pregnant or plan to get pregnant
  4. Depression, other mental health issues
  5. Support system
  6. Resistance testing
  7. Issues/barriers to taking your drugs on time every day
  8. Dosing schedule

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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
- www.facebook.com/thewellproject
- www.twitter.com/thewellproject