



Managing the Symptoms of HIV Treatment

The goal of HIV treatment is to fight the virus with medications without having too many side effects. HIV medications may lead to a number of side effects, especially within your first month of therapy. The following are some side effects you may experience and how to best manage them.



Osteoporosis

Both HIV and medications used to treat HIV can cause osteoporosis, which is a loss of bone mass or bone thinning. Factors like weight, inactivity, smoking and other medications can worsen bone thinning. To improve your overall bone health, ask your doctor about medications that may help prevent bone loss. Regular exercise and eating a healthy diet high in calcium and vitamin D also improves bone health.

Skin Changes

Both HIV and medications used to treat HIV can cause skin problems. Due to the impact HIV has on the body's ability to fight infections, there is an increased risk for skin infections. You should monitor your skin for changes and tell your doctor if you notice any of the following symptoms.

- Boils (may be pus or clear fluid)
- Raised itchy areas near hair follicles
- Blisters (especially along the waistline)
- Purple bumps on skin
- New or worsening acne
- New itching or scratching sensation
- Flaky, scaly or extremely dry areas

Rash

Rashes are common with HIV treatment. The rash is often described as itchy and red, and may go away on its own after a few weeks. Sometimes when HIV medicine causes a rash it may be necessary to switch to another HIV medicine. A rash that may not seem serious can be very serious and a sign of life-threatening condition that requires immediate medical attention. Please tell your doctor if you do develop a rash.

Signs of a severe rash can include:

- Redness around the area
- Swelling
- Red streaks in the area
- Spreading to other areas
- Increased pain
- Fever or chills
- Pus

To avoid infection, try not to scratch your skin. Cover any nicks and cuts with bandages, and don't let your bare skin touch floors, benches or equipment in gyms and saunas.

- ▶ Put on unscented moisturizer at least twice a day.
- ▶ Avoid hot showers or baths—lukewarm water is best.
- ▶ Take an oatmeal bath to help with itching.
- ▶ Put a cold pack wrapped in a towel on your skin.
- ▶ Avoid wearing tight clothing
- ▶ Stay out of the sun.
- ▶ Pat, rub or apply pressure instead of scratching.

Anemia

Anemia is when your blood lacks enough healthy red blood cells. People with severe anemia may feel:

- Very tired
- Muscle weakness
- Coldness in hands and feet
- Dizziness
- Trouble thinking
- Trouble breathing
- Headache
- Pale skin

Go to all scheduled lab appointments and if you feel any side effects, you should contact your doctor right away.

Diarrhea

- ▶ Eat smaller meals.
- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids
- ▶ Avoid foods that may upset your stomach, like milk products, spicy or fried foods, caffeinated drinks and carbonated beverages.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor before taking anything for diarrhea

Nausea, Vomiting, or Dehydration

Some HIV medications may make you feel nauseous, especially when you start therapy. These symptoms usually improve after a few weeks. Symptoms can range from mild dizziness to severe vomiting. Tell your doctor if you haven't been able to eat or drink for more than a day, as a change in medication may be needed.



Medication can make each patient feel differently. If you experience side effects tell your doctor.

- ▶ Eat small meals throughout the day.
- ▶ Drink eight glasses of water per day.
- ▶ Start with a liquid diet.
- ▶ Once you are able to keep liquids down, try things like bananas, rice, applesauce and toast.
- ▶ Eat a few crackers before getting up in the morning.
- ▶ Drink and eat slowly.
- ▶ Eat foods at room temperature.
- ▶ Keep windows open for fresh air.
- ▶ Avoid greasy, fried or spicy foods.
- ▶ Try to get plenty of rest.

High Cholesterol

HIV and medications used to treat HIV can increase your risk for heart disease. People who have high cholesterol are at an increased risk for heart attack and stroke. If needed, your doctor may recommend medication to help lower your risk.

- ▶ Eat a balanced diet
- ▶ Exercise regularly
- ▶ Know your family history of heart disease
- ▶ Do Not Smoke. If you do smoke please consider a smoking cessation program to quit.

Weight changes

Now that treatment options have improved, weight loss is less common. It's still important to monitor your weight and call your doctor if you notice weight change of more than 5 pounds in a month. In addition to weight changes, you may notice a buildup of body fat, loss of body fat, or both. This is better known as lipodystrophy. Fat buildup (also called lipohypertrophy) can occur:

- Around organs in the abdomen
- On the back of the neck between the shoulders (called a buffalo hump)
- In the breasts
- Fat loss (also called lipoatrophy) tends to occur:
 - In the arms and legs
 - In the buttocks
 - In the face

Lactic Acidosis

Lactic acidosis often develops gradually. Early signs of lactic acidosis can include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and weight loss. These symptoms may not seem serious, but they can be the first signs of life-threatening lactic acidosis. Always tell your health care provider about any symptoms that you are having—even symptoms that may not seem serious.

Lactic acidosis can advance rapidly. Signs of life-threatening lactic acidosis include the following:

- Above-normal heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes (jaundice)
- Weakness

Nervous System Changes

HIV can impact your nervous system. The nervous system is responsible for things like pain, sleep, mood, memory and more. The following are areas of the nervous system that may be affected by HIV and HIV treatment. If you experience any of the following, contact your doctor.

Neuropathy: Neuropathy is pain or numbness in the feet and legs, and can make you feel unsteady while walking.

Headache: If your CD4 count falls below 200, there is an increased risk for severe infections. Headaches can be a sign of such infections. They often begin gradually and worsen over time. Other symptoms that may occur include stiff neck or fever.

Memory Loss: Memory loss may be related to feelings of stress or depression. There are also medications used to treat HIV that can cause problems focusing. When related to HIV medications, the memory issues occur most often in the morning and should resolve after the first week of therapy.

Strange Dreams: Specific medications used to treat HIV can cause strange dreams. The dreaming may at times be so realistic it becomes difficult to sleep. If you feel that the dreams are causing problems with your daily activities or you begin to hallucinate, contact your doctor.

Anxiety and Depression: Medications used to treat HIV can worsen pre-existing anxiety and depression. It's important to tell your doctor if feelings of anxiety or depression arise. Your doctor may choose to change your medication.

FAQs

What is human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)?

HIV is a virus that impacts the body's immune system. It targets CD4 cells, which are white blood cells that help your body fight off infections. You will often hear your doctor discuss both CD4 counts and viral loads. Viral load is the amount of HIV virus in your body—the lower the viral load and the higher the CD4 count the better.

What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

Not everyone who has HIV has AIDS. AIDS is an advanced form of HIV that can often be avoided with successful treatment. AIDS occurs when the body can no longer fight off infections successfully.





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Additional Resources:

POZ - www.poz.com

POZ Latino - www.poz.com/latino/

AIDS.gov - www.aids.gov

The Body - www.thebody.com

AIDSmeds - www.aidsmeds.com

Project Inform - www.projectinform.org

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