

Antiretroviral Therapy for the Treatment of HIV

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Editorial

Antiretroviral therapy refers to any HIV treatment that uses a combination of two or more drugs. A healthcare provider may choose to prescribe a combination of three or more drugs to improve the treatment's chance of success.

Specialists introduced antiretroviral therapy in 1996 in response to the poor success rate among those taking only one HIV medication at a time. The beginnings of three-drug antiretroviral treatment marked a turning point in the history of HIV treatment. The new treatment design transformed what used to be a diagnosis with a very poor outlook into a manageable condition. Antiretroviral therapy has a twofold effect on the body. It increases the number of immune cells while also decreasing the number of virus cells present in the body.

HIV treatment involves taking medicine that reduces the amount of HIV in your body.

- HIV medicine is called antiretroviral therapy (ART).
- There is no effective cure for HIV. But with proper medical care, you can control HIV.
- Most people can get the virus under control within six months.
- Taking HIV medicine does not prevent transmission of other sexually transmitted diseases.

Treatment Reduces the Amount of HIV in the Blood:

- The amount of HIV in the blood is called viral load.

- Taking your HIV medicine as prescribed will help keep your viral load low and your CD4 cell count high.
- HIV medicine can make the viral load very low (called viral suppression). Viral suppression is defined as having less than 200 copies of HIV per milliliter of blood.
- HIV medicine can make the viral load so low that a test can't detect it (called an undetectable viral load).
- If your viral load goes down after starting HIV treatment, that means treatment is working. Continue to take your medicine as prescribed.
- If you skip your medications, even now and then, you are giving HIV the chance to multiply rapidly. This could weaken your immune system, and you could become sick.
- Getting and keeping an undetectable viral load (or staying virally suppressed) is the best way to stay healthy and protect others.

Antiretroviral therapy has the following positive effects on HIV:

- Stops it from multiplying in the blood
- Reduces viral load, which is the number of HIV copies in the blood
- Increases the number of CD4 cells, which are immune cells that HIV targets, to improve immune system function
- Slows down and prevents the development of stage 3 HIV, or AIDS
- Prevents transmission
- Reduces the severity of complications and increases survival rates
- Keeps virus counts low in the blood

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