

HIV and Immediate Start to Treatment

Treating your HIV as soon as possible is best for your long-term health



Accessing HIV medication

For support to find a HIV doctor, or chemist, or if you want to talk about your HIV diagnosis and options for HIV medication with a peer (someone else living with HIV), contact Positive Life NSW by calling (02) 8357 8386, 1800 245 677 (freecall) or email contact@positivelife.org.au

The Facts

- HIV medication, also called HIV antiretroviral (ART) treatment, is very effective, and people living with HIV on this medication will live long and healthy lives.
- Treating your HIV with HIV ART medication will prevent HIV from reproducing in your body and keep your immune system healthy.
- HIV ART medication also reduces your risk of developing AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), opportunistic infections such as pneumocystis pneumonia (PCP) or cancers such as Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS).
- HIV ART medication is recommended for all people living with HIV, regardless how long you have been living with HIV.
- The earlier you start treating your HIV with HIV ART medication after your HIV diagnosis, the more support you are giving your immune system.
- The majority of doctors in NSW agree that HIV medication can be started within 24 hours of a new HIV diagnosis as long as there are no other complicating medical issues.
- Even though there is no cure for HIV, lifelong HIV medication is very successful.
- Some people get side effects from HIV medication, which are normally very mild. Side effects can be discussed and managed with your HIV doctor.
- Taking HIV medication is effective in preventing HIV transmission to your sexual partners. This is known as [Treatment as Prevention or TasP](#) (also known as undetectable=untransmissible, U=U).

HIV antiretroviral medication will slow or stop any potential damage to your body from HIV

Benefits of starting HIV medication

There are a number of benefits for your long-term health when you start HIV antiretroviral medication immediately after your HIV diagnosis.

- HIV medication will slow or stop any potential damage to your body by HIV.
- HIV medication also reduces your risk of developing serious HIV related illnesses or AIDS.
- Taking HIV medication as prescribed by your HIV doctor can reduce the HIV virus in your blood to a level where it is 'undetectable'. This means the amount of HIV in your body is reduced to the point where it will not damage your immune system and you cannot pass on HIV during sex.
- If you are planning on becoming pregnant, it is essential to take your HIV medication as prescribed. This will significantly reduce the chance of passing HIV onto your baby during pregnancy and birth.

Things to know about HIV medication

- Starting HIV medication is completely your choice. It's your decision if and when you start HIV medication.
- Starting HIV medication is an important decision to discuss with your HIV doctor.
- Once you begin HIV medication it will need to be taken as prescribed for the rest of your life.
- There are a number of different HIV medication treatments available today. Some people take only one pill a day which contains a combination of two or three HIV medications.
- You may experience some side effects when starting HIV medication. This is normal and these side effects should wear off over the first few weeks.
- If side effects continue, do not stop your HIV medication. It is important that you discuss these with your HIV doctor. Changing your HIV medication may be an option.
- It's important to take your HIV medication as prescribed by your HIV doctor. By doing this, the HIV virus in your blood is reduced to a very low or 'undetectable' level. This is called an 'undetectable viral load'.
- If you are having problems taking your HIV medications or if you have any questions about the HIV medications, discuss this with your HIV doctor. It is also important to discuss any other medications you are taking, including over-the-counter products, with your doctor or your Pharmacist to minimise any potential interactions.

Accessing HIV medication in NSW

- In NSW, HIV medications are free for all people living with HIV. They are also known as 's100 Highly Specialised Drugs'.
- HIV medication can only be prescribed by your [HIV specialist doctor \(also called an 's100 prescriber'\)](#) who has the authority to prescribe s100 Highly Specialised Drugs.
- You can start HIV medication the same day you are diagnosed if you want to. A HIV s100 prescribing doctor can prescribe it to you, as long as there are no other complicating medical conditions.
- To get free HIV medication, [you will need to fill out a consent form every 12 months](#) with your HIV specialist or GP and give it to your pharmacist along with the prescription.
- In NSW, you can get your HIV medications from local chemists, [NSW sexual health clinics](#), or public and private hospital pharmacies. You will also be able to get free medication from a hospital pharmacy.
- If you live in a regional or remote area of NSW, it is possible to arrange to have your HIV medication posted to you.
- If you are ineligible for Medicare or do not have a Medicare card and need HIV medication, please call Positive Life for safe, free and confidential information and support. (02) 8357 8386 or 1800 245 677 (freecall), or email contact@positivelife.org.au

Online Resources

[Click here to find an HIV s100 prescriber](#)

[Click here to find a chemist or pharmacy that stocks HIV medication](#)

[Click here to read the Positive Life NSW Treatment as Prevention \(TasP\) Factsheet](#)



For more information phone 02 8357 8386 or 1800 245 677 (freecall) or visit www.positivelife.org.au

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The voice of all people living with HIV

Positive Life NSW