

SIDE EFFECTS OF DRUGS



HIV/AIDS QUALITY OF CARE INITIATIVE (HAQOCI)



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WHAT ARE SIDE EFFECTS?

Side effects are what a drug does to you that you don't want it to do. Medications are prescribed for a specific purpose, such as to control HIV. Anything else the drug does is a side effect. Some side effects are mild, like a slight headache.

Others, like liver damage, can be severe and, in rare cases, fatal. Some go on for just a few days or weeks, but others might continue as long as you take a medication, or even after you stop.

Some conditions are called side effects even though we don't know what causes them. In some cases, HIV disease itself might be as much of the cause as true drug side effects.

WHO GETS SIDE EFFECTS?

Most people taking anti-HIV medications have some side effects. In general, higher amounts of drugs cause more side effects. If you are smaller than average, you might experience more side effects.

Also, if your body processes drugs more slowly than normal, you could have higher blood levels and maybe more side effects.

Each medication comes with information on its most common side effects. Don't assume that you will get every side effect that is listed. Some people have only minor side effects when they take their HIV medications.

HOW TO DEAL WITH SIDE EFFECTS

There are several steps you can take to prepare yourself to deal with side effects.

- Learn about the normal side effects for the medications you're taking.
- Talk to your health care provider about what side effects to expect. Ask when you should get medical attention because a side effect goes on too long, or has become severe.
- In some cases, your doctor can write you a prescription for something you can take to deal with a side effect if it gets severe.

- If you're having stomach problems, make sure you have plenty of food that you like to eat and easy on your stomach.
- Do not stop taking any of your medications, or skip or reduce your dose, without talking to your doctor. Doing so can allow the virus to develop resistance (*see brochure QOC3 on ADHERENCE TO DRUGS*), and you might lose the use of some antiviral drugs. Before side effects make you skip or reduce doses, talk to your doctor about changing drugs.

When you start antiviral treatment, you may get headaches, hypertension, or a general sense of feeling ill. These usually improve or disappear over time. Common side effects include;

Fatigue:

Most people with HIV feel tired at least part of the time. It's important to find the cause of fatigue and deal with it.

Digestive Problems:

Many drugs can make you feel sick to your stomach. They can cause nausea, vomiting, gas, or diarrhoea. Remedies include:

- Instead of big meals, eat small amounts, more often.
- Eat mild foods and soups, not spicy.
- Don't skip meals or to lose too much weight.
- Gas and bloating can be reduced by avoiding foods like beans, some raw vegetables, and vegetable skins.

Skin Problems:

Some medications cause rashes. Most are temporary, but in rare cases they indicate a serious reaction. Talk to your doctor if you have a rash. Other skin problems include dry skin or hair loss.

Most people who take anti-HIV medications have some side effects. However, don't assume you will get every side effect you hear about.

Get information on the most common side effects and how to treat them. Be sure you know when to go back to your doctor because a side effect may have gone on too long or gotten severe.

Don't let side effects keep you from taking your medications. If you can't deal with them, talk to your doctor about changing your drugs.