

## WHY START HIV MEDICATIONS

Research shows there are many benefits to taking HIV medications. These benefits include:

- Longer life
- Improved quality of life
- Preserved or repaired immune system
- Reduced chances of developing HIV related illnesses
- Reduced chances of giving HIV to someone else

## RISKS OF NOT TREATING HIV

In most people, if HIV is left untreated it will eventually destroy the immune system. It will also cause chronic inflammation, which is associated with several health problems. Untreated HIV can lead to:

- Heart disease
- Kidney disease
- Liver disease
- Lymphoma (lymph node cancer)
- Other cancers
- Problems with thinking and memory

**HIV MEDICATIONS  
ARE RECOMMENDED FOR  
ALL PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV.**

**TALK TO YOUR PROVIDER.**

**Public Health**  
Seattle & King County 

**HIV/STD Program**  
[www.kingcounty.gov/health/hiv](http://www.kingcounty.gov/health/hiv)

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**Available in alternative formats**

# HIV MEDICATIONS: WHEN TO START

On March 29, 2012 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services updated its guidelines for when to start antiretroviral drug treatment (HIV medications). This brochure summarizes the new guidelines and discusses issues, questions, and concerns people living with HIV often have about when to start medications.

**Public Health**  
Seattle & King County 

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

HIV medications are recommended for **ALL** people living with HIV. When to start meds may depend on your CD4 count and other health factors.

### HIV meds are **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED** if:

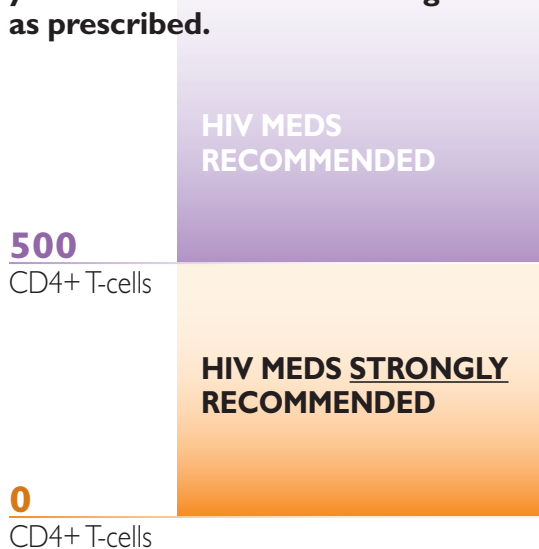
- ➔ Your CD4 count is 500 or lower:  
—or—
- ➔ You are HIV positive and pregnant.
- ➔ You have had an AIDS related illness, such as Kaposi's sarcoma.
- ➔ You have nephropathy (kidney disease) because of HIV.
- ➔ You are HIV positive and also have Hepatitis B.

### HIV meds are also **RECOMMENDED** if:

- ➔ Your CD4 count is greater than 500.

**Even if you feel healthy, you should talk to your HIV provider about starting meds.**

**Once you decide to start HIV medications, you have to commit to taking the drugs as prescribed.**



## CONCERNS ABOUT STARTING HIV MEDICATIONS:

You might have a variety of concerns about starting HIV medications:

CONCERNS	FACTS
<b>The drugs may cause unpleasant side effects.</b>	Newer drugs for HIV have fewer and less severe side effects.
<b>Taking HIV meds might be difficult and complicated.</b>	Newer HIV medications are much simpler to take. Most people only need to take 1-4 pills once a day.
<b>My virus might become resistant to the meds.</b>	Your doctor should test your virus for resistance before starting you on HIV medications. Taking HIV meds as prescribed will reduce your chances of developing resistance.
<b>There may be more important priorities in life at this moment than taking HIV medications.</b>	If you've made an informed decision that now is not the best time to start taking meds, that's OK. Keep talking to your medical provider about when you would like to start.
<b>There may be effective alternatives to antiretroviral drugs for the treatment of HIV.</b>	Taking HIV medications doesn't mean that you can't also use alternative treatment. Antiretroviral drugs are the only scientifically proven effective treatment for HIV.
<b>Taking HIV meds long term might be toxic.</b>	The long term effects of taking HIV medications aren't fully understood. The new recommendations, which are based on what we know in 2012, suggest that for almost all people with HIV, it's better to be treated than not treated.
<b>If I start taking HIV meds, will I have to take them for the rest of my life?</b>	Although you will have to take HIV medications long term, you can stop if it isn't working or you're having serious side effects. There may be a limit to the number of times you can stop and re-start.

## TALK TO YOUR PROVIDER

The new HIV treatment guidelines recommend that **ALL** people with HIV should be on HIV medications.

This recommendation is a response to growing evidence that, in most people, not treating HIV has a negative impact on health at all stages of

infection. Today HIV medications are effective, have few side effects, and are easy to take.

If you're not taking HIV medications, and haven't talked to your HIV medical provider recently about starting, now might be a good time to have that talk.