



plain and simple facts

HEALTH CONCERNS



HIV Treatment: Know Your Options

What is HIV?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. Only people who have HIV get AIDS.

A virus is a kind of germ that can make you sick. For example, some viruses can give you a cold. Others can give you the chickenpox, the flu or a cold sore.

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

What is CD4+?

CD4+ refers to a kind of cell in the blood. Your body is made up of many different kinds of cells. Each cell has its own job to do.

CD4+ cells help keep you healthy. They protect you from some germs.

What HIV does

HIV attacks and kills CD4+ cells. When there are not enough CD4+ cells, it is easier for germs that attack the body to make you sick. And the more HIV you have in your body, the greater chance you have of getting sick.

How your body fights HIV

HIV kills CD4+ cells. Your body fights back by making more CD4+ cells. This starts as soon as the virus gets into your body.

Even when you are feeling fine, HIV is attacking CD4+ cells. When the number of CD4+ cells goes down too much, your body can't protect itself. Then you can get sick from other germs more easily.

How doctors keep track of HIV

Doctors and healthcare professionals can measure how many CD4+ cells are in the blood. This is called a "CD4+ count." A blood sample is taken from you to do this.

Doctors can also measure how much HIV is in the blood. This is called "viral load."

These and other tests can help the doctor identify appropriate treatment options for you.

HIV can be very tricky to fight

HIV is a tricky virus. It keeps changing. Because it keeps changing, it's hard for your body to fight HIV only one way. Sometimes, the virus is changing in a way that lets it escape from a drug treatment. This virus is then called a drug-resistant virus.

Keeping HIV levels down may help you live longer

Caring about yourself through healthy living, eating right, and exercising can help you fight HIV.

Canadian AIDS Treatment
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And in some people, new treatment options are reducing the amount of virus in the blood to levels so low they can't be counted. If you reduce the amount of virus, you may live a longer, healthier life.

While there is still no cure for HIV, making the right choices about healthy living and treatment options can help you fight HIV as long as possible.

Combining treatment options is better

Today there are many new ways to treat HIV that can make it harder for the virus to make you sick.

New treatment options can be used together in many ways. Some may work better for you. Others may fit better with your lifestyle.

You and your doctor should decide what works best for you.

It's important to stay on your treatment plan

Whatever treatment options you and your doctor have chosen, it's important to stay with them as long as you can. Choosing a treatment plan that will work for you is important because stopping treatment, even for a short time, can allow HIV to reproduce. Keeping up your treatment isn't always easy. Sometimes, while they are working, they may make you:

- Feel tired.
- Have headaches.
- Feel sick to your stomach.
- Have diarrhea.
- Break out in a rash.

Ask your doctor about ways to make you feel better.

Working together

Today, having HIV doesn't mean you have to give up. You and your doctor make a strong team. Together, you can find the best way to live a longer, healthier life.

The Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) provides free of charge, to all Canadians, information on the latest treatments, drug therapies, complementary therapies, clinical trials and health care related to HIV/AIDS. It is the only national bilingual organization of its kind in Canada.

CATIE assists physicians and other healthcare providers with information on AIDS treatment advances. We also advocate for improved research, better treatments and easier access to treatments. By providing HIV/AIDS treatment information, CATIE encourages people living with HIV/AIDS to be actively involved in making decisions and developing strategies to optimize their health care.

If you have any questions about the information you just read, call CATIE (1-800-263-1638) and speak with a Treatment Information Representative. It's confidential and free.



Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV-related illness and the treatments in question.



The Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) in good faith provides information resources to help people living with HIV/AIDS who wish to manage their own health care in partnership with their care providers. Information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE, however, is not to be considered medical advice. We do not recommend or advocate particular treatments and we urge users to consult as broad range of sources as possible. We strongly urge readers to consult with a qualified medical practitioner prior to undertaking any decision, use or action of a medical nature.

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This information is also available in French, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Swahili, and other languages at languages.catie.ca and www.acas.org

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