



HIV ➤ Health and Treatments

- 4.1 Monitoring your health
- 4.2 Blood tests
- 4.3 Treatments
- 4.4 Complementary therapies

4.1 Monitoring your health

Working with your doctor to stay healthy and avoid infections is an important part of living with HIV. This means having regular checks and blood tests four to six times a year. Regular checks are very important so your doctor can note any changes in your health and advise you on what to do.

Regular visits to the dentist are also recommended to prevent tooth decay and gum disease.

4.2 Blood tests

There are two blood tests that your doctor will order at each visit to see how HIV is affecting your immune system:

Viral load test

Viral load refers to the amount of HIV that is in your blood. HIV is constantly multiplying. By measuring the amount of HIV in your blood, your doctor can tell how quickly the virus is multiplying.

The higher the viral load, the faster HIV is multiplying, and the greater the risk of damage to your immune system.

CD4 count

HIV destroys the CD4 cells in your immune system. By measuring the number of CD4 cells in your blood, your doctor can tell how much damage HIV has done to your immune system.

These tests will give you and your doctor a picture of how HIV is progressing in your body and help you decide when to start treatment.

If you are on HIV treatment, the tests also help monitor how the treatment is working.

4.3 Treatments

Even though there is no cure for HIV, treatments are available that can control the virus so that people living with HIV can enjoy healthy and productive lives. These drugs are called anti-retrovirals (ARV). They do not destroy HIV, but they slow the virus multiplying in your body and the damage to your immune system.

You may have heard of people who have an undetectable viral load. This means the amount of virus in the blood is so low the viral load test is unable to detect it. It does not mean there is no HIV in their body. Hence, use of condoms still remains the safest way of not transmitting HIV. Dropping to such low levels is the aim of taking anti-retroviral drugs.

The best person to talk to about treatments is a doctor who specialises in HIV. If your doctor is not experienced in HIV/AIDS, make an appointment with a doctor at a sexual health clinic. Major hospitals also have HIV specialists. AIDS Councils in most states and territories can also advise

you about treatment and services.

Things to know about treatments:

- HIV treatments are very effective but treatment is life-long.
- You need to take the treatment exactly as your doctor says, and make sure you don't miss any pills.
- Some people get side effects. If you notice any, it is important to tell your doctor.
- Recreational drugs can affect the way your treatment works. If you are on treatments and are planning to use recreational drugs, talk to your doctor or a treatments officer at an AIDS Council.
- Taking anti-retrovirals is an important decision that you need to discuss with your doctor. Take time to ask questions and make sure you have all the information you need.

"I started on HIV treatment a few years ago. Before that I used to get sick and had been in hospital a few times. The treatments have improved and are easy to take. My health is much better and I feel great. It's really worth taking the treatment".

4.4 Complementary Therapies

Some people with HIV use other types of therapy, either alone or with their anti-retrovirals. As with any form of medicine, no complementary therapy can cure HIV.

Complementary therapies include traditional medicine, hypnotherapy, meditation, homoeopathy, acupuncture, naturopathy and massage.

It is important to tell your HIV specialist if you are using any of these, as some may interfere with HIV treatment.

