

# Factsheet Adherence tips

## Key points

- You may find that a pill box, a phone alarm or a diary helps you with adherence.
- Adherence can be more challenging when travelling or when routines are changed.
- If you find adherence difficult, talk to your clinic team for support and help.



You need to take your HIV treatment as prescribed for it to work properly. The word often used for taking your treatment as prescribed is **adherence**.

A common reason why people miss doses of their anti-HIV drugs is because they simply forget to take them. If you forget to take a dose of your drugs, try to learn from the experience so you can reduce the risk of it happening again. What was happening that meant you forgot?

## Using a pill box

Lots of people find pill boxes useful. These have separate compartments into which you can put each dose of your medicine. Some people find it helpful to fill their pill box at the start of the week so they can keep track of exactly which pills they have taken.

Pill boxes might be available for free from [your HIV clinic](#) or you can buy them from high-street chemists.

## Keeping a diary

You could try keeping a diary where you record taking each dose of your medicine or use a calendar and tick each day as you take your pills.

## Jogging your memory

Some people find that setting an alarm on their watch or mobile phone, or setting an email alert, helps them to remember to take their medication. There are also some smartphone apps available which will send you a reminder.

If you live with someone who knows about your HIV status, perhaps your partner, a family

member or flatmate, you could ask them to help you remember to take your medication.

Making a connection between taking your medication and something else you do every day can be a helpful way of adding it to your routine. For example, if you take your medication before you go to sleep you could keep your medication next to your bed.

## Changes to your routine

Simple changes to your daily routine, for example getting up earlier or later, or going out for the night, might mean that you forget to take your medicine.

Some people keep doses of their medication in different places in case they forget to take their medication. For example, in their coat pocket or bag, at work, in the glove compartment of their car, or at a friend's or relation's home. It's important to make sure that medicines are stored out of the reach of children. Remember also that medicines can go out of date and some need to be kept at a certain temperature.

## Travelling with your medication

You might find the following information useful if you are planning to [travel with your HIV medicines](#).

Remember to take enough medicine with you if you are going to be away from home, even if it is just overnight.

Carry medicines in your hand luggage. This means it's easier to get to and is less likely to get lost.

*"For many people, understanding how their treatment works and feeling involved in decisions about their care is a very important motivation."*

If you are travelling a long way and crossing several time zones you might need to change the time you take your medicines. Our factsheet, [Travelling with HIV medications – time zone changes](#), summarises the recommendations on how to do this safely.

Taking a break from treatment when you travel can have risks, including the development of drug-resistant HIV. Do not stop taking your medicines without discussing this with [your doctor](#).

## Food and drink

If you often take your drugs when you are away from home, then keeping a refillable bottle of

water handy can be helpful. Some medicines need to be taken with a meal or snack; if this is the case for you, it may be helpful to keep a snack handy too. Planning ahead to make sure you have suitable food at home and whenever you are travelling can make life easier.

## Medications for other conditions

You may sometimes be prescribed treatment for other health problems, by your GP or another health professional. The tips in this factsheet may also be helpful for you when remembering to take those treatments.

But having to take more treatments can make adherence more difficult – particularly if you have to take them at different times of day or in a different way. If you're finding it difficult, or find yourself forgetting which treatments to take when, talk to your doctor or another member of your healthcare team.

**It's important to tell your doctor or pharmacist about other drugs you are taking, including drugs prescribed by another doctor, drugs you buy from a high-street chemist, herbal remedies and recreational drugs.**

Sometimes drugs interact with one another and this can affect how well they work, as well as sometimes causing side-effects.

## Talking to your doctor

It's a good idea to talk to [your doctor](#) if you are forgetting to take a lot of doses of your treatment, or if you are having any other problems with it. Help is available to support you in taking your medication. Or it might be possible to change your treatment so that your medicines are easier to take.

If you have questions or concerns about your treatment, your doctor or someone else in your clinic such as a nurse, health adviser or pharmacist, should be happy to talk to you about it. They may also be able to put you in touch with other people living with HIV for support, either through peer supporters based in the clinic or through peer support organisations.

For many people, understanding how their treatment works and feeling involved in decisions about their care is a very important motivation.

You might find it helpful to write down questions or things you want to talk about before your appointment. You may also find it helpful to take notes or to ask your doctor to write things down for you to remind you what was said when you get home.

## Find out more

**Taking your HIV treatment** Information booklet

**My drugs chart** Online, interactive tool

**Taking your HIV treatment (adherence)** Simple factsheet

**Taking drugs on time** Basic leaflet with pictures