



HIV Treatment

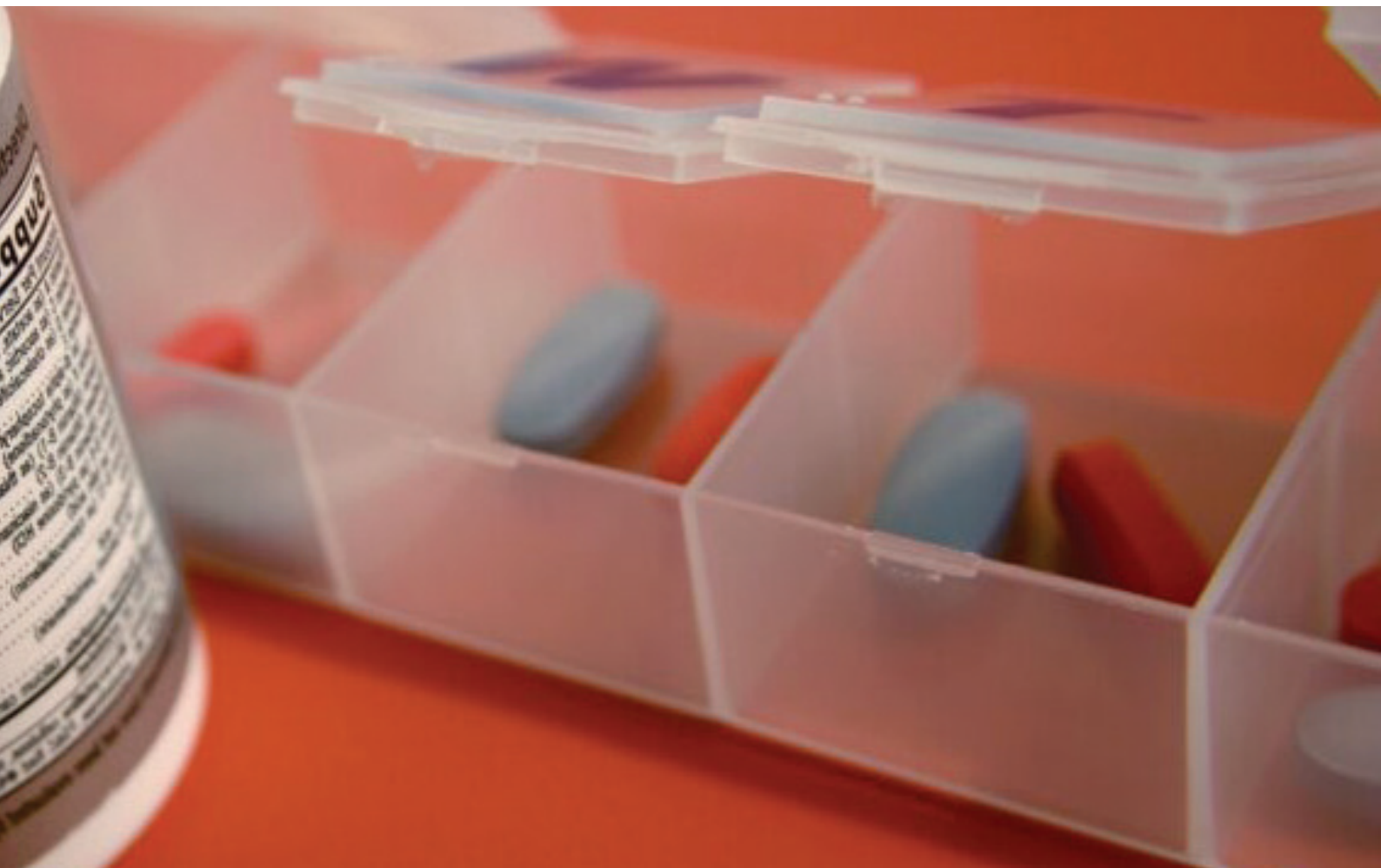
Living with HIV and being Undetectable

This info-sheet is a compilation of information to provide more understanding on the life-saving Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART). This also contains what you need to know about living with HIV and lead a healthy lifestyle. Living with HIV, with consistent ART uptake, allows one to live a life not different from the rest of the population.

Let's talk about living with HIV.

Many thousands of gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) are living with HIV in Asia and the Pacific. A person living with HIV can live a healthy life if he is on HIV treatment. If you are diagnosed with HIV, get your treatment as early as possible!

This will support your body to fight the infection and keeps your health at a higher standard.



WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ARV AND ART?

Drugs used to treat HIV are called **antiretrovirals (ARVs)** because HIV is a type of virus called a retrovirus. **Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)** includes or a combination of active drugs. Some pills contain more than one drug and some pills contain a complete combination of two or three or four drugs.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends ART for all people living with HIV as early as possible after diagnosis without any restrictions of CD4 counts.

HOW IS HIV TREATED?

Combination treatment with at least three different antiretroviral medicines is now standard treatment for all people newly diagnosed with HIV. Fixed-dose combinations and once-daily regimens are preferred. Adherence to, and consistent uptake of, ART stops HIV from multiplying and can suppress HIV to undetectable levels in blood. This allows a person's immune system to recover, overcome infections and prevent the development of AIDS and other long-term effects of HIV infection.

The specific drugs that work for you will depend on you - how your body reacts to treatment, what other medications you may be taking or what other existing medical issues you may have. That's why it's important to see a specialist for treatment.

CAN I TRANSMIT HIV TO MY PARTNERS IF I AM ON ART?

The ART is effective for viral suppression. People living with HIV who are virally suppressed have zero risk in transmitting the virus to their sexual partners. If you are undetectable, you can't transmit HIV to others!

Undetectable equals Untransmittable, U=U!

HOW CAN I ACCESS ART?

Unfortunately, access to HIV treatment varies between countries - check with your local MSM community-based organization or HIV clinic to find out where it is available, the cost and what you need to do to access the treatment.

For more information on how to access ART in your area, you may contact:

- Sexual health clinics
- Selected community-based clinics / organizations
- HIV doctors
- Contact APCOM for advice and recommendations



REMEMBER

- Sometimes it takes time to find the right health care provider, one who you are comfortable with and trust. Seek advice from MSM organizations or HIV clinics about who has a good reputation for treating MSM living with HIV.
- HIV treatment and your care is a lifetime commitment, so please find a doctor you trust and with whom you can discuss your worries and doubts.
- Adhere to your ART. Stick to your ART rules. Missing doses and stopping and re-starting treatment can lead to drug resistance, which can allow HIV to multiply and progress to diseases. Qualified and professional doctors will support People living with HIV on treatment to overcome the challenges to taking treatment regularly.
- Set up reminders on your phone to take your medication - other people may see your phone notifications, so perhaps discrete labels on your reminders would be a good solution!
- Do not try to treat yourself - HIV treatment needs to be overseen by a trained medical doctor.
- You will need regular follow-ups (every three months in most cases) with your doctor to check that the ART is effectively suppressing the virus.
- Some people have reactions to their medicines. If this happens, contact your health care provider ASAP. Do not stop your medication unless the reaction is life-threatening.

Resources:

1. Antiretroviral therapy. World Health Organization. 2013.
Available at: <https://www.who.int/hiv/topics/treatment/art/en/>
2. HIV treatment. NIH's Office for AIDS Research. September 2020.
Available at: <https://hivinfo.nih.gov/understanding-hiv/fact-sheets/hiv-treatment-basics>
3. Men who have sex with men (MSM) slides 2019. AIDS Datahub.
Available at: <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/resource/men-who-have-sex-men-msm-slides>
4. Sailing Together With and For the Community, 2019 Annual Update. APCOM.
Available at: <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/resource/apcom-2019-annual-update.pdf>

