

Doctor Discussion Guide: Talking to your doctor about HIV

When you have HIV---1 infection your relationship with your doctor is a big factor in managing your condition. It's important to find a healthcare professional you feel comfortable talking to—so that you can work together to make informed treatment decisions.

Here are some tips that may help you become an active partner in your care.

Before your visit:

1) Learn more about HIV. You may find the following Web sites helpful:

- www.AidsMeds.com
- www.TheBody.com
- www.AIDSinfo.nih.gov

2) Write down any questions or concerns about your treatment or condition

3) Make a list of all medicines you take, including all prescription and non---prescription (or over---the---counter) medicines, as well as vitamins and supplements

4) Bring a pen and notebook to take notes

During your visit:

1) Ask your doctor about the results of your tests, including:

- **Viral load:** How much virus is in a sample of your blood; usually measured as the number of copies of virus per milliliter of blood. It may be used to judge how well your treatment is working.
- **CD4+ cell count:** A type of white blood cell (sometimes called T---cell) that fights infection and can be attacked by HIV.
- **Resistance testing:** Determines if the virus has mutated (or changed form) in such a way that it is no longer controlled by certain medicines
- **Some other tests to check your health:** These may include blood tests to evaluate your liver and kidney function or other tests to check for other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or infections like hepatitis

2) Discuss how you are doing with taking all of your HIV medicines. And, be sure that you're open and honest. You may feel nervous telling your doctor that you haven't been taking your medicines every day as directed. But your doctor may be able to provide you with tips to help you remember to take your medicines

Here are some suggestions to help you start this conversation with your doctor:

- "I can't quite get a routine down for taking my meds every day. Could we talk about my work, sleep, and eating habits so we can develop a plan that works for me?"
- "I have trouble remembering my meds on weekends, days off, holidays, and vacations. Can you help me come up with a plan for dealing with interruptions to my daily activities?"
- "I'm having problems with stress and it's really getting in the way of taking my meds. Can you give me some tips to help me manage my stress, or refer me to someone who can help me work through my problems?"
- "I think I need more support in between visits. Do you have a counselor on your staff, or can you connect me to someone who can help?"

3) Tell your doctor about any symptoms or side effects right away

Here are some questions you may want to ask to start this conversation with your doctor:

- "I've been feeling _____ [list your symptoms]. Could these symptoms be related to my HIV treatment?"
- "Will these side effects lessen or go away?"
- "What can I do to help manage my side effects?"

4) Ask about other health concerns. Ask for your doctor's advice on creating a healthier diet, avoiding smoking, and other things you can do to improve your overall health

5) Ask about places where you can get ongoing support between visits—such as an HIV/AIDS clinic. A clinic may be able to provide counseling and connect you to resources for issues such as transportation, employment, or other needs

6) Keep your regular appointments. Regular monitoring of your condition is important for managing your HIV---1 infection

