

**Ministry Of Health
National AIDS Program**

**Frequently Asked Questions
What do you know about AIDS?**



- **How long does it take for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) to develop into AIDS?**
People infected with HIV might see no symptoms for several years, and it could take the virus more than 8 to 10 years – sometimes 15 years - to develop into AIDS. The duration varies significantly and depends on several factors, including the patient’s health condition and their lifestyle/behavior. Presently, several modern medical treatments can slow down the effects of HIV on the immune system.
- **Where can HIV be found in the human body?**
HIV exists in varying amounts (and at varying points of time) in the blood, body fluids and secretions of HIV-infected people.
- **How is HIV transmitted?**
The AIDS virus is transmitted from an infected person to a healthy person via body fluids that contain the live virus, such as semen, blood and its components, vaginal fluids and breast milk.
- **HIV can be transmitted via:**
 1. Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person
 2. Transmission of infected blood, or any blood component, or a body part transplant, from an infected person to a healthy person. This includes the use of non-sterile needles and syringes.
 3. From an infected mom to her child.

So far, sexual intercourse with an HIV-infected person (without the use of protection/condom) is the most common way HIV is transmitted.
- **What is a virus?**
Viruses are the smallest and simplest of life forms. They are too small to be seen in light microscopy.
- **What is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)?**
HIV is the name of the virus that causes AIDS. The “**human**” part of the name means the virus only affects humans, and lives only in the human body. “**Immunodeficiency**” means the body’s immune system is deficient or is collapsing. The immune system is the body’s **line of defense** against infections.
HIV attacks the immune system and takes over eventually. Although the immune system can usually protect the body against many types of infections, it cannot defeat the multiplying HIV.

- **What is an opportunistic infection?**
An opportunistic infection happens as a result of an HIV infection. It is called opportunistic because it takes advantage of a failing immune system that has lost its ability to fight pathogens.
- **What is the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)?**
AIDS is a disease that results from an HIV infection, where the virus gradually overtakes the body's immune system. In other words, HIV is the cause and AIDS is the result. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: “**Acquired**” means the disease is not genetic or inherited. “**Immune Deficiency**” indicates a deficiency in immune cells leading to the collapse and weakening of the immune system. “**Syndrome**” means that AIDS is not limited to one disease or symptom, but rather a group of diseases and symptoms. AIDS is the medical diagnosis of a group of symptoms that result from the collapse of the immune system due to an HIV infection.
- **What is the risk of HIV infection via a bite from an infected person?**
There is no risk of infection by biting if the skin remains intact. All documented cases of virus transmission through biting involved a serious wound and tissue damage, as well as bleeding.
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/transmission.htm>
- **What is the risk of HIV infection via skin scratches or surface wounds?**
There is no risk of HIV infection via a surface scratch since it does not involve body fluid transmission. Infected persons who suffer open or deep wounds should have these wounds treated and covered as soon as possible.
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/transmission.htm>
- **What is the risk of HIV infection due to a body piercing?**
There is a risk of HIV infection in case non-sterile and virus-infected tools are used for the piercing. Tools that penetrate skin should be sterilized and used only once, then safely disposed of or sterilized for further use.
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/transmission.htm>
- **What is the risk of HIV infection via the spit of an HIV-infected person?**
There is no risk of HIV infection via spitting. The virus was detected in very low amounts and in a non-living form in the saliva of infected patients. It hasn't been proven that saliva alone can transmit the virus. Additionally, there are no documented cases of HIV being transmitted via the spit of an infected person.
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/transmission.htm>

- **Can HIV be transmitted via casual social interaction?**

HIV is not transmitted via casual daily interaction in workplaces, homes, schools or social settings. It also cannot be transmitted via casual social interactions like handshaking, hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing, swimming, using the same toilet, sharing food and drink utensils, or using the same vehicle. Additionally, HIV is not transmitted via air, food or water.

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/transmission.htm>

- **Can HIV be transmitted via mosquitoes?**

HIV is a fragile virus that cannot survive for long periods of time outside the human body. HIV cannot be transmitted via mosquitoes or other blood-sucking insects. Even if the virus enters the body of the insect, it cannot multiply inside its body which means the insect cannot be infected by HIV, and consequently cannot transmit it to a human body when it sucks its blood or bites it.

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/transmission.htm>

- **What is the risk of HIV infection via kissing?**

There is no risk of infection through kissing. Open-mouth kissing can be a risk only if the infected person suffered from ulcers or bleeding in their gums, thus allowing blood or plasma to be transmitted. HIV-infected persons should avoid open-mouth kissing with their healthy partners.

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/transmission.htm>

- **Can I know if a person is HIV-infected just by looking at them?**

You cannot tell if someone has AIDS by their appearance. An HIV-infected person could look and feel healthy. A blood test is the only way to know if someone has contracted HIV.

- **What should you do if you think you were exposed to HIV?**

You should seek medical advice immediately from the closest healthcare provider in your area. Taking an HIV detection test might be recommended. It is important to remember that if you have recently been infected with HIV, you are highly susceptible to infection during the early stage (called the window period) even if early test results don't come out positive.

- **What is the preventive treatment after exposure to HIV?**

Preventive treatment after exposure to HIV consists of several antiretroviral drugs, to be prescribed within 48 hours of exposure. It is recommended that these medications be taken within the first 6 hours to protect against infection. Nevertheless, preventive treatments after exposure are not 100% effective, even if taken shortly after exposure, but it is vital that all precautions be taken to prevent infection. Research shows that prevention is possible if preventive medication is taken immediately after exposure. In order for it to be effective,

preventive treatment should be offered as soon as possible after exposure, no later than 72 hours. The treatment lasts for 28 days without interruption, under the supervision of healthcare specialists.

- **Where can I get tested for HIV?**

Please contact centers for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) in KSA, which are managed by the Ministry of Health or relevant charity organizations.

- **Are test results in VCT centers confidential?**

Test results for HIV infection are completely confidential for any individual requesting counselling and testing for HIV. The name and identity of individuals are not revealed, and no personal information are requested.

- **Can HIV be transmitted during sport participation?**

There are no documented cases of HIV infection or transmission during participation in sports. The risk is very low and is only possible while participating in sports involving direct and unprotected body contact. In general, a person suffering from AIDS should not participate in sports until their wound has stopped bleeding and is sterilized and securely bandaged. Where no bleeding is involved, there is no risk of HIV transmission during sports.

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/transmission.htm>

- **Can HIV be transmitted via body fluids that get mixed in food?**

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) did not receive any reports related to foodstuff being contaminated by the blood or semen of HIV-infected people. Furthermore, no reports were received about HIV infection due to consuming foods that contain the virus. The human immunodeficiency virus cannot live long outside the human body. Even if someone consumed food that was contaminated by small amounts of blood or semen of an HIV-infected person, the virus is destroyed either by exposure to air, the heat of cooking or stomach acids. Consequently there is no risk of HIV infection via consuming contaminated food.

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/transmission.htm>

- **Does male circumcision protect from HIV infection?**

Circumcision lowers the risk of HIV transmission through unprotected sexual intercourse. It only lowers the risk of transmission, but does not prevent infection via sexual intercourse.

- **How can I know if I am infected with HIV?**

The only way to determine whether or not you have contracted the AIDS virus, is to take an HIV test. Infection cannot be determined based on any symptoms as the majority of HIV-

infected people do now show any symptoms and can look healthy for years, while unknowingly transmitting the virus to others.

- **What should I do if I contracted HIV?**

Thanks to modern drugs and treatments, many HIV-infected people can live longer and healthier lives, provided that they commit to the treatment. It is vital that you consult a doctor who has experience in dealing with HIV. Healthcare providers or HIV consultants can give you advice and help you find the right doctor who can follow-up and provide treatment for your case. Peer support can help significantly when dealing with HIV infection.

- **To stay healthy:**

1. Follow your doctor's instructions and make sure you go to all your appointments and take your medication exactly as prescribed.
2. Get vaccinations to prevent associated diseases, such as pneumonia, influenza, etc.
3. Eat healthy food and drink clean, sterilized water.
4. Exercise regularly and make sure you get enough sleeping and rest.
5. Request counselling, information about prevention, care, and treatment options.
6. Request to know if your sexual partner is infected, and request couples counselling.
7. Follow your doctor's advice about practicing safe sex and limiting the risk of transmitting the disease to your partner or children.
8. Get tested and treated for any associated diseases, such as malaria and Tuberculosis, as well as other sexually transmitted diseases.
9. In cases of a pregnancy, the mother should receive information about prevention and ways to prevent transmitting the diseases to her child, as well as recommendations about child nutrition.

- **What does a negative HIV test result mean?**

If a test for AIDS infection came out negative, it means that the body did not contain any HIV antibodies at the time of testing. If the test result is negative you should make sure it stays that way, by educating yourself about transmission, ways to prevent it and by avoiding any risky behaviors that could lead to infection.

It is still possible that a person is infected, especially if the infection happened via one of the common ways, as it takes the immune system up to 3 months, and in some very rare cases 6 months, to produce enough antibodies to detect the infection in a blood test. Therefore, re-testing at a later date after exposure to HIV is recommended, in addition to taking the proper precautions. It is important to note that a person is highly contagious to others during the "window period", which means necessary precautions should be made to prevent any further infection.

- **Who should get HIV counselling?**

Any person getting tested for HIV can get counselling upon receiving test results, and regardless of the results. Anybody can receive a counselling session following their test, regardless of the test results. Pre-testing counselling is vital for voluntary counselling and testing efforts, as it helps visitors evaluate personal risk factors and establish actionable strategies to deal with test results. Voluntary counselling and testing is considered both the primary and secondary prevention strategy (limiting the risks of HIV exposure and infection).

- **What does a positive HIV test result mean?**

The blood test aims to detect HIV antibodies through two widely-common tests, namely the ELISA test and the Western Blot test. These standard HIV tests do not detect the virus itself, but rather the antibodies produced by the immune system in response to the HIV infection. Statistics show that, when infected with HIV, most people produce antibodies within 12 weeks. Standard tests carried out during this “window period” cannot detect antibodies. Therefore, a negative blood test does not necessarily mean that the individual is not HIV positive. The test should be conducted again after 2-3 months from the date of exposure to HIV.

For more information, please contact centers for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) across the KSA.

A positive HIV test result means the individual carries the virus (HIV) that causes AIDS. Being HIV positive does not mean already having AIDS. However, left untreated HIV can destroy the immune system, leading to AIDS symptoms within a short while.

- **Is there a link between AIDS and other diseases?**

HIV weakens the immune system, allowing other diseases to take over the human body. In many cases, these other diseases are what causes the symptoms. Evidence shows that HIV positive people are more likely to contract other diseases, like tuberculosis, compared to those who do not have HIV.

- **Is there any available treatment for HIV?**

Presently, there is no treatment for AIDS. There are, however, drugs and medications that can help HIV positive patients slow down the virus, limit its spread and lower the risks of associated opportunistic infections. Medication can help patients feel much healthier and live longer with no health complications. Antiretroviral medications fight the virus and somehow slows its growth. The treatment comprises a mixture of antiretroviral drugs to limit the multiplication of the virus – leading to a lower risk of opportunistic infections.

- **Am I still contagious even if I am on antiretroviral drugs?**
Even if test results show very low levels of HIV in blood, this does not mean that the virus is eliminated, and therefore the patient can still transmit the virus to others. When there is only a small amount of active viruses in the blood, there could still be more in semen or vaginal fluids. Although infection is less likely when the viral load is low, it is still possible and proper precautions must be taken.
- **Is it possible to have safe sexual intercourse with an HIV-positive person?**
The risk of infection is much lower if the patient's test shows low levels of HIV in body fluids due to regular treatment.
- **Is there a vaccine for HIV?**
Currently, there are no vaccines for HIV, despite global research efforts.
- **Why should I get HIV tested?**
Knowing whether or not you have AIDS has two vital benefits. If you have contracted the virus, then you can take the necessary steps, like treatment, care and support, before symptoms appear, thus limiting the associated health risks.
On the other hand, if you are HIV-positive, you can take precautions to prevent transmission of the virus to others around you.
- **What's the relation between HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)?**
HIV and STDs are correlated. When an HIV-positive person contracts an STD, there is a higher risk of HIV infection to others. STDs cause damage in the skin and membranes of the patient's genitals, which leads to skin irritation and ulcers that allow HIV to pass into the body more easily during sexual intercourse. Early treatment of STDs lowers the risk of infection among sexual partners, as well as the risk of HIV infection.
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- **Do women face the same risk of HIV infection as men?**
- Women are actually at a greater risk of HIV infection due to the structure of the female reproductive system. Therefore, it is vital that females educate themselves about HIV, and get tested before attempting pregnancy.

- **Does HIV affect high-risk groups only?**

Any risky behavior involving an HIV-positive person will put you at risk of infection. An HIV-negative person is likely to be infected if they shared contaminated syringes or sharp tools with HIV-infected persons, or was part of a blood transfusion where the blood or any of its components is contaminated with HIV. Children might contract the virus through their mothers during pregnancy, delivery or after they are born through breast milk.

- **How can the risk of HIV infection be limited for injection-drug users?**

HIV can be transmitted when people share contaminated injections and syringes, but steps can be taken to limit this risk. This includes refraining from re-using needles and syringes or sharing them with others, as well as avoiding risky behaviors.

- **What is stigma?**

“Stigma” is defined as a mark of disgrace and a negative reputation that diminishes an individual’s value in their community. Stigma could also be a common negative reaction against people suffering from certain diseases (such as leprosy, tuberculosis, STDs, etc...). HIV is strongly linked with social stigmas as it is associated with risky and socially unacceptable behaviors, especially by high-risk groups, thus making the stigma even worse for such groups.

- **How can stigma affect behavior associated with HIV infection?**

Stigma against HIV-positive people creates a wall of silence regarding AIDS, and limits HIV patients’ access to means of prevention, treatment and care. Stigma also aggravates the discrimination against such groups, robbing them, in some cases, of their basic human rights such as healthcare, education, job opportunities and marriage. It could also negatively influence the level of care provided to the stigmatized individual.

- **How can I protect myself against HIV infection?**

Since there are no vaccines or effective treatments for HIV, prevention is the best way to protect oneself.

1. Avoid risky sexual behaviors, and use latex condoms if HIV infection is suspected. In cases of latex allergy, use polyurethane as an alternative. Avoid using lubricants, and if necessary use water-based lubricants only.
2. The risk of HIV transmission from a pregnant mother to her child is significantly lower if the mother takes antiretroviral medications during pregnancy, delivery and when breastfeeding, provided that the child is also treated during the first six weeks of life.
3. Having an STD increases the risk of HIV infection through sexual intercourse, as well as the risk of infecting others with the STD. It is vital that STDs are treated as soon as possible upon suspicion of infection.

- **How effective are condoms against HIV infection?**
Male and female latex condoms are very effective in protecting against STD infections, including HIV. For maximum protection, condoms should be used correctly and consistently with every sexual intercourse. Incorrect use might compromise the effectiveness of condom as it may leak or get torn.
- **How can mother-to-child HIV transmission be prevented?**
HIV can be transmitted from the infected mother to her child during pregnancy, delivery or after delivery through breast milk. The risk of mother-to-child HIV transmission is significantly lower if the mother takes antiretroviral medications during pregnancy, delivery and when breastfeeding, provided that the child is also treated during the first six weeks of life. A mother suffering from AIDS should avoid breastfeeding her child.
- **Is it safe to work with an HIV-positive person?**
There is no risk of infection through working with someone who has AIDS. Since the virus is mainly transmitted through blood, semen or vaginal fluids, AIDS patients pose no risk of infection to their coworkers. You can share your phone, work side by side, eat and drink with HIV-positive people without risking infection.
- **If someone has HIV, should they be allowed to continue in their job?**
HIV-positive individuals who still enjoy good health should be treated like any other employee. AIDS patients should also be treated like any other employee who gets sick. Contracting HIV is not a reason to terminate an employee as long as their job does not involve any behavior that causes transmission of the virus.
- **Who provides care to HIV-infected individuals?**
Everyone connected to an HIV-positive individual is a candidate care provider. This includes in particular healthcare workers at all levels, social workers and counselors, as well as close family members who are the key care providers at home. Care, in this sense, means clinical management, nursing, counseling, psychological and social support.
- **What other types of care do HIV patients need?**
In addition to antiretroviral therapy, HIV-positive individuals need psychological and social care, good nutrition, clean water, basic hygiene, counseling and psychological support. This helps the patient lead a high-quality life.

- **What is the role of young people concerning HIV?**

Young individuals can play a key role in preventing and controlling the transmission of HIV. From protecting themselves and their peers, their role extends to include protecting their families and communities. They need to seek more information about HIV, how it is transmitted and, more importantly, how to prevent its transmission. They need to push the adults in their lives into honest and open discussions about HIV.

Young people can communicate better with their peers than with older people, which means they have a responsibility to educate, motivate and help their friends and peers, by raising awareness about HIV and the safe behaviors that can protect them from infection.

- **Where can I get more information?**

For more information, please contact a Voluntary Counseling and Testing Center near you.

- **What are antiretroviral medications?**

Antiretroviral medications are used to treat and prevent against HIV. These medications counteract the virus by stopping or limiting its multiplication inside the body.

- **Can antiretroviral medications cure AIDS?**

There is no known cure for HIV or AIDS at present. Antiretrovirals reduce the viral load, which is the amount of virus in your bloodstream. A blood test measures the viral load. People with undetectable viral loads stay healthier longer. They are also less likely to transmit HIV infection to others. Some people's viral load is so low that it is undetectable by the viral load test. This does not mean that the virus is gone, and it does not mean a person is cured of HIV infection.

<http://www.aidsinfonet.org>

- **What is the viral load?**

A viral load test measures the amount of HIV virus in your bloodstream.

<http://www.aidsinfonet.org>

- **How does antiretroviral therapy work?**

HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system and disrupts its functions. Contracting this virus causes a gradual collapse of the immune system – which is key to protecting the body against diseases and cancers- causing an immune deficiency. Using antiretroviral medications stops the virus from multiplying. If this succeeds, then immune cells – mainly CD4 – can live longer, thus providing better protection against infection.

- **How are antiretroviral medications used to treat AIDS?**

Antiretroviral drugs are usually used in combinations of three or more drugs from more than one class. This is called "Combination Therapy." Combination therapy works better than using a single antiretroviral, as it helps prevent drug resistance. Using at least three drugs makes it harder for the virus to adapt and resist the drugs, so does using these drugs regularly and correctly. If the drugs are not used regularly, HIV could develop resistance.

<http://www.aidsinfonet.org>
- **What is "HAART"?**

Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) is another term describing a combination therapy of three or more HIV antiretroviral drugs.
- **What is drug resistance?**

When HIV multiplies, many of the new copies have mutations: they are slightly different from the original virus. Some mutant viruses keep multiplying even when you are taking ARV drugs. When this happens, the virus can develop resistance to the drug and ART may stop working. If only one ARV drug is used, it is easy for the virus to develop resistance. For this reason, using just one drug is not recommended. But if two or three drugs are used, a successful mutant would have to "get around" all of the drugs at the same time. Using combination therapy means that it takes much longer for resistance to develop.

<http://www.aidsinfonet.org>
- **A CD4 cell count is recommended when:**
 - Someone tests positive for HIV for the first time
 - Every 3 to 6 months to monitor the strength of the immune system
 - Every 6 to 12 months if the CD4 count is much higher than 250.
- **What antiretroviral drugs can I use?**

Any antiretroviral drug can have side effects, some of which may be serious. Some elements of a combination therapy might be tolerated better than others by some patients, and some could be more effective than others. This depends on the individual's reaction to the drugs. It is recommended to change the therapy if the viral load is not reduced, or if it decreases only to rise again.
- **What are side effects?**

Side effects are what a medication does to you that you don't want it to do. Medications are prescribed for a specific purpose, such as to treat HIV. Anything else the drug does is a side effect.

Some side effects are mild, like a slight headache. Others, like liver damage, can be severe and, in rare cases, fatal. Some go on for just a few days or weeks, but others might continue as long as you take a medication, or even after you stop. Some occur within days or weeks of starting a drug. Others may only show up after months or years of therapy.

http://www.aidsinfonet.org/fact_sheets/view550

- **Who gets side effects?**

Most people taking antiretroviral medications (ARVs) can have side effects. In general, the more ARVs you take, the more side effects you may experience. People with less than average body weight may experience more side effects. If the body processes drugs more slowly than normal, it could have higher drug levels in its systems and have increased risk of ore side effects. Some side effects become worse if the drug is taken on an empty stomach. Others may increase if the drug is taken with fatty food or drink such as whole milk.

Each medication comes with information on its most common side effects. Don't assume that you will get every side effect that's listed! Most people have few or only minor side effects when they take their ARVs as directed.

http://www.aidsinfonet.org/fact_sheets/view550

- **Viral load test facts:**

- Only about 2% of the HIV in your body is in the blood. The viral load test does not measure how much HIV is in body tissues like the lymph nodes, spleen, or brain.
- HIV levels in lymph tissue and semen go down when blood levels go down, but not at the same time or the same rate.
- You should not have blood taken for a viral load test within four weeks of any infection or immunization.

<http://www.aidsinfonet.org>

- **When do I start antiretroviral therapy?**

All patients should be treated upon confirmation of their diagnosis, regardless of their viral load. It is vital that patients commit to their treatments.

<http://www.aidsinfonet.org>

- **What is a viral load test?**

The viral load test measures the amount of HIV virus in your blood. It is the preferred way to monitor how an HIV patient is responding to treatment.

- **A viral load test is recommended:**

- Before starting treatment or when treatment is changed, to act as a reference.
- After 2 to 8 weeks of treatment or treatment change, to monitor if the treatment is working

- Every 3 to 4 months, to help ensure the continued effectiveness of the treatment. For patients who still haven't started treatment, the test helps determine a start date.
- Treatment failure is indicated by a confirmed viral load above 200 copies.

- **How do you deal with side effects?**

There are several steps you can take to prepare yourself to deal with side effects:

- Learn about the most common side effects for the medications you are taking.
- Talk to your health care provider about what side effects to expect. Ask when you should get medical attention because a side effect goes on too long, or has gotten severe.
- Find out if you can treat mild side effects with home remedies or over-the-counter medications.
- In some cases, your health care provider can write you a prescription for something you can take to deal with a side effect if it gets severe.

Do not stop taking any of your medications, or skip or reduce your dose, without talking to your health care provider! Doing so can allow the virus to develop resistance, and you might not be able to use some ARVs. Before side effects make you skip or reduce doses, talk to your health care provider about changing drugs!

- **What are the most common side effects?**

When you start antiretroviral therapy, you may get headaches, hypertension, or a general sense of fatigue. These usually improve and disappear over time.

- **Fatigue:** People with HIV can feel tired at least part of the time. It is important to find the cause of fatigue and treat it accordingly.
- **Anemia:** Anemia can cause fatigue. Anemia increases your risk of infection with HIV infection. Routine blood tests can detect anemia, and it can be treated.
- **Digestive Problems:** Many drugs can make you feel sick to your stomach. They can also cause nausea, vomiting, gas, or diarrhea. Home remedies include:
 - Instead of three big meals, eat smaller amounts, more often.
 - Eat mild foods and soups, not spicy.
 - Ginger tea and the smell of fresh lemon might settle your stomach.
 - Exercise regularly.
 - Gas and bloating can be reduced by avoiding foods like beans, some raw vegetables, and vegetable skins.
- **Diarrhea:** Can range from a small hassle to a serious condition. Tell your health care provider if diarrhea goes on for more than a few days or if it is serious. Drink lots of liquids.
- **Lipodystrophy (Body Shape Changes):** Includes fat loss in arms, legs and face; fat gain in the stomach or behind the neck, as well as high levels of fats (cholesterol) and sugar (glucose) in the blood. These can increase the risk of heart disease or stroke.

- **Skin Problems:** Some medications cause rashes. Most are mild and temporary, but in rare cases they indicate a serious reaction. Talk to your health care provider if you have a rash. Other skin problems include dry skin or hair loss. Moisturizers help some skin problems.
- **Peripheral Neuropathy:** It is a painful condition caused by nerve damage. Neuropathy normally starts in the feet or hands.
- **Mitochondrial Toxicity:** Which is damage to structures inside the cells. It might cause neuropathy or kidney damage, and can cause a buildup of lactic acid in the body.
- **Osteoporosis:** Bone problems are common in people living with HIV. Bones can lose their mineral content and become brittle. On the other hand, low blood supply could cause problems in the pelvis area. Get enough calcium from food and supplements. Weight-bearing exercise like walking or weight lifting can be helpful.

The Bottom Line

Most people who take ARVs have side effects. However, do not assume you will get every side effect you hear about!

Be sure you know when to go back to your health care provider because a side effect may have gone on too long or gotten severe.

Do not let side effects keep you from taking your medications! Do not assume that taking ARVs means you have to put up with the side effects. If you cannot deal with them, if they continue for more than a few weeks, or they affect your quality of life, talk to your health care provider about changing your drugs.

http://www.aidsinfonet.org/fact_sheets/view550

- **Antiretroviral drugs include first, second and third line regimen. What is the difference between them?**

HIV can quickly adapt to any of the antiretroviral drugs used to treat it, and can change itself through mutations. This is why a combination therapy of several antiretrovirals can stop being effective, allowing the virus to multiply. The first mix of combination therapy used by the patient is called the **First Line Regimen**.

When the first line regimen is no longer effective against HIV, need arises for a new regimen consisting of new drugs. This is often only needed years after the first therapy, and is called **Second Line Regimen**.

Eventually, if the second line regimen fails, a **third line regimen** (or a drug cocktail) is recommended. You should not take antiretroviral drugs without medical supervision.

- **How can antiretroviral drugs prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission?**

HIV can be transmitted from a mother to her child during pregnancy or during delivery. It can also be transmitted through breastfeeding. This is called mother-to-child transmission or MTCT.

There are many ways to prevent infection, and it is necessary that all pregnant women get HIV tested.

If a pregnant woman is HIV-positive, she should be treated with pregnancy-appropriate antiretroviral drugs, as this ensures the child does not contract HIV.

Even if the mother does not need ARVs for treatment, she should still use the treatment during pregnancy and delivery, in order to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission.

Once the baby is born, the mother should consider alternatives to breastfeeding, that are safe, feasible and acceptable to her and her family on the long run. All mothers need clear information, support and counselling in order to make the right choice.

In most high income countries, newborn HIV infection rates are lower than 1% due to the use of combination therapy and good maternity care during pregnancy.

HIV-positive women wishing to get pregnant are advised to first consult healthcare providers, to limit the risk of giving birth to infected children.

You should not take antiretroviral drugs without medical supervision.