Living Positively with HIV

Preventing Illness and Managing Treatment
What is this booklet for?

This booklet gives basic information about how to prevent and treat opportunistic infections like Tuberculosis (TB) and diarrhoea when you are living with HIV. It also gives information on treatment and the importance of ARV adherence and follow-up.

What is Positive Living and why should I care?

Positive Living means taking care of your health and body when you have HIV. A person with HIV can live a healthy, normal and productive life when they practice Positive Living.

What do I do when I feel sick?

Your body is kept safe from diseases by your immune system. Your immune system is like an army. HIV is like an enemy which attacks your army. After some time, the HIV will destroy your immune system so it is very easy for you to get sick.

When you feel sick it is important to go to a health center immediately. A health worker can assess the strength of your immune system with tests and will advise you if you need medicine.
Infections and illness wears down your body and allows HIV to become stronger and progress into AIDS faster. Diseases like Tuberculosis (TB) and Pneumonia are called Opportunistic Infections (OIs) because they can hurt your body by taking advantage of your weaker immune system.

There is medication you can take to reduce your chances of getting illnesses such as diarrhoea, pneumonia and TB. See a health care worker to find out about Cotrimoxazole and INH to prevent OIs.

**TAKING COTRIMOXAZOLE AND INH HELPS PROTECT YOU FROM INFECTION AND ILLNESS.**

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a germ that attacks your lungs and other parts of the body. TB if not treated can lead to death. TB can be cured if you see a health worker for treatment and medicine.

Symptoms of TB include cough for more than 2 weeks, coughing up blood, fever, night sweats, lack of appetite, loss of weight, and general body weakness. If you have symptoms you need to see a health worker immediately.

**People with HIV have trouble fighting TB so it is important to get screened early for TB.** Get a TB screen every time you go to the health center, especially if you know someone who has tested positive or if you have any symptoms. There is medication available to help prevent and treat TB.

TB can be prevented from spreading by opening windows at home and in public places to let fresh air in, always covering one’s mouth with a piece of cloth or elbow when coughing and completing one’s TB treatment.

**GET TESTED EARLY FOR TB AND SEE A HEALTH WORKER IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS.**

**Why is it important to get tested for TB?**

**How does Cotrimoxazole and INH help prevent opportunistic infections?**
How do I prevent diarrhoea?

Wash your hands, wash your food and fruits, and keep a clean compound to prevent Diarrhoea. You should wash hands with soap and water after using the latrine, before preparing food, and before eating. Keep your compound clean by sweeping your yard, keeping your latrine clean and covered, and keeping water in a clean container with a lid.

Practice good sanitation and hygiene to prevent diarrhoea.

When do I start taking ARVs?

ARVs are for people living with HIV whose immune system has become weak.

ARVs can bring a person with AIDS back to good health and keep a person with HIV healthy. However, they are not a cure for HIV and AIDS.

Not everyone who is HIV-infected needs ARVs. A health worker will assess to find out if you need ARVs. If your immune system is very weak, your health worker may advise you to start ARVs.

It is important to see a health worker for follow up on care and treatment so you can stay healthy and live longer. Do not wait until you feel sick to see a health worker.

See a health worker to find out when you need to start taking ARVs so you can stay healthy.
Why is ARV adherence important?

It is important to remember to take your ARVs every day. Every time you forget to take your drugs, they become less effective, and can stop working.

If your ARVs stop working your immune system will get weaker and you will be sick. You will have to take new drugs that may be hard to find.

ARVs that a health worker gives you are different from traditional remedies. Traditional remedies may relieve the symptoms but they do not strengthen the immune system like ARVs. Traditional remedies will not treat or cure HIV/AIDS.

How can I manage the side effects from my medications?

ARVs are very strong drugs and side effects are common. Side effects usually go away in 4-6 weeks when your body becomes used to the drugs. It is important to continue to take your ARVs even if you get side effects.

If you stop taking your ARVs, the ARVs will no longer work; your immune system will get weak and you will get sick. If you have any trouble taking your ARVs tell a health worker. Visit a health worker regularly for checkups.

Some side effects from ARVs are minor and can be managed or will go away. But some side effects are serious and need medical attention. If your side effects are very severe go see a health worker immediately.
Glossary of Terms:

AIDS: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

ARVs (antiretroviral): a combination of drugs taken together to slow HIV from reproducing by protecting CD4 cells in the immune system.

CD4: white blood cells in the immune system (‘the soldiers in the body’).

CD4 count: test that measures the strength of your immune system. The higher your CD4 count is, the stronger your immune system.

Cotrimoxazole: the group of the drugs that Bactrim belongs to (people who are allergic to Bactrim have other options).

Diarrhoea: a sickness caused by bacteria getting into the food we eat or the water we drink.

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the virus which causes AIDS.

Immune system: the parts throughout the body that protect against diseases.

INH: Isoniazid or (isonicotinylhydrazine) – medication used in prevention and treatment of tuberculosis (TB).

Opportunistic infections (OIs): diseases that take advantage of your lowered immune system (e.g. TB).

Pneumonia: an illness caused by bacteria and viruses that makes the lungs swollen and make a person cough, have fever and breath with difficulty.

Side effects: bad feelings a person may get from taking medications.

Traditional remedies: drugs or concoctions that are made from herbs or other unknown substances.

Tuberculosis (TB): a disease caused by germs that attack the lungs that is spread from person to person through the air when they cough or sneeze.

Where can I get more information?
All public health facilities and private health facilities.

Tips for Positive Living

Drink safe, clean water
Go for routine checkups and get medical treatment
Eat healthy, balanced diet
Stay active

Wash hands regularly to prevent diarrhoea
Get enough rest
Adhere to medication given to you by a health worker
Avoid drugs and alcohol

Keep your counselling appointments
Practice safer sex
Join a support group

REMEMBER: A PERSON WHO IS HIV-INFECTED CAN HAVE A NORMAL, PRODUCTIVE AND HEALTHY LIFE WHEN THEY PRACTICE POSITIVE LIVING.