



Specialty Pharmacy
HIV Wellness Guide

Walmart 

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1 Introduction

Whether you're actively managing a condition or just looking for info, Walmart Specialty Pharmacy is here to support you every step of the way. We make it easy to get your prescriptions, stay on track with your medication refills, and answer any other questions you may have.

We understand that treatment with medication isn't always the whole picture and want to help you understand the lifestyle changes that can make managing your condition easier on a daily basis.

Remember, your health conditions do not define you! It's okay to ask for help.

2 What is HIV?

Human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, is a chronic condition that affects the body's ability to resist and fight infection. There is no known cure; however, people infected with HIV are often able to control it with proper medical care, often living long, healthy lives. If untreated, however, HIV can lead to serious complications, including AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).^{1,2}

What causes HIV?

HIV is transmitted from person to person when certain bodily fluids from an infected person get into the bloodstream of someone who is uninfected. This is most common during unprotected sexual interaction—i.e., without a condom. The sharing of drug injection equipment can also lead to infection, as can the exposure to an infected person's open cuts or sores.¹



3 What are the symptoms, stages, & effects of HIV?

After infection, HIV can progress in 3 stages:

Stage 1: Acute infection

- Some people may not feel sick after their initial infection with HIV; others experience flu-like symptoms within 2 to 4 weeks, such as fever, chills, rash, night sweats, fatigue, muscle aches
- Acute infection is detectable only with antigen/antibody or nucleic acid tests (NATs)
- Even if symptoms do not appear, people with acute HIV infection are contagious

Stage 2: Chronic infection (may also be called asymptomatic infection)

- People may not experience symptoms at first, but they usually appear with the onset of Stage 3
- By taking medicine, some people can prolong this period and avoid progressing to Stage 3
- Even if symptoms do not appear, people with acute HIV infection are contagious

Stage 3: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

- The most extreme stage of HIV, AIDS represents a high viral load and is very infectious
- AIDS attacks the immune system, causing damage that increases the risk of certain infections. Some examples of common coinfections include Hepatitis B and C, tuberculosis, and pneumonia among others.
- People with AIDS usually survive about three years without medication and treatment

Even when controlled with medication, HIV can cause chronic inflammation. Taking HIV medication daily as prescribed, staying in regular medical care, and getting your lab tests done are key to staying healthy and preventing these infections.^{3,4}

4 What can you do to treat HIV?



While there isn't yet a complete cure for HIV, the condition can be controlled with proper medical care. The goal is to reduce the amount of HIV in the blood and prevent transmission to others. Viral suppression helps you achieve an undetectable viral load, with almost no risk of transmitting HIV to partners through sex.^{3,5}

With proper care and treatment, most people can get HIV under control within six months. This typically involves taking medicine called antiretroviral therapy (ART). These antiretrovirals include: non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs), nucleoside or nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs), protease inhibitors (PIs), integrase inhibitors, and entry or fusion inhibitors.⁵



5 Lifestyle choices & self-monitoring treatments

Lifestyle choices and self monitoring go hand-in-hand with medication. Some of these options include:



Diet and nutrition. A nutritious and balanced diet is important for everyone, but especially for those with HIV.² Eating well is essential for maintaining strength, energy, and a healthy immune system. And some conditions related to treating HIV or AIDS (including wasting, diarrhea, and lipid abnormalities) can be better controlled with a healthy diet.



Food safety. HIV affects the immune system,¹ which can put you at greater risk for food-borne illness.² Basic food safety can help you protect yourself, including:

- Thoroughly washing fruits and vegetables
- Avoiding raw eggs, meats, or seafood, including sushi, oysters, and shellfish
- Washing hands and utensils with soap and water after each use
- Avoiding drinking untreated water, such as water from lakes, ponds, rivers, or streams.



Stay active. People with HIV can often perform the same types of physical activity and exercise as they did before infection. By staying active, you can help keep your body healthier, stronger, and more resistant. Individual activities can include walking, running, biking, dancing, jumping rope, or swimming. You might also consider group activities like an aerobics or yoga class, or playing on a local sports team.



Stop smoking. Smoking tobacco can have a very negative effect on anyone's health, but it's especially risky for those with HIV, who are more likely to experience a shorter lifespan and to develop such serious conditions as cancer, heart disease,⁴ lung cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).⁶ If you're having trouble quitting, you can find helpful books and products at Walmart.com.



Get vaccinated. People with HIV are at high risk of developing serious complications from flu, COVID-19, and other conditions. Making sure that you're up to date on your immunizations and vaccines is the best way to protect you and your loved ones;² it also helps to ensure that, if you do get sick with flu or COVID-19, your illness will likely be milder, helping to keep you out of the hospital.



Care for your mental health. Besides threatening your physical health, HIV can be a serious source of mental stress. This can lead to changes in your mental well-being, or complications of existing issues like depression. Talk to your healthcare provider if you're feeling that your mental health is suffering. Finding outlets for stress relief can also help.



Find support. Treating HIV can be challenging. Those who have families may find significant benefit in including them in their support plan.

6 Other resources for coping with & treating HIV:

- HIV care and treatment services. Find local HIV medical care, housing assistance, and substance abuse and mental health services at: <https://locator.aids.gov/>
- Find your state HIV/AIDS toll-free hotline. Connect with agencies that can help determine what services you are eligible for and help you get them at: <https://hab.hrsa.gov/get-care/state-hivaids-hotlines>
- Search for HIV care specialists. Find HIV providers who are members of the American Academy of HIV Medicine at: <https://providers.aahivm.org/referral-link-search?reload=timezone>
- Get help paying for HIV care. If you do not have health insurance or money to pay for health services, you might qualify for medical care and other essential support services. You can learn more at: <https://hab.hrsa.gov/get-care/get-hiv-care>
- Check to see if you qualify for disability benefits. If you have HIV and cannot work, you may qualify for benefits from the Social Security Administration. Find the details at: <https://www.ssa.gov/disability/professionals/documents/64-037.pdf>
- Walmart Pharmacy is a safe space to learn more about HIV medications.

References and sources for further reading

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