

Our+Care OC

A newsletter created by HIV-positive individuals for people living with HIV



In our last issue, we discussed many topics about ways for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWH/A) to stay healthy. We talked about the importance of getting medical care as early as possible after being diagnosed and not waiting until you feel sick. We also talked about the importance of keeping your appointments with your doctor to maintain a healthy immune system and keep your viral load (the amount of HIV virus in a sample of your blood) in control. Another thing that you can do to stay healthy and keep your viral load low is by taking HIV medicine.

Starting HIV Medicine

The Public Health Services guidelines recommend that everyone living with HIV should take HIV medicine. There are many things that must be taken into consideration before starting treatment. The most important thing is to talk to your doctor to see if this is something that is right for you. Some doctors may not start a person on HIV medicine because:

- CD₄ count is high
- Medical conditions determined by your doctor
- Known or reported changes in a patient's daily routine.

5 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO STAY HEALTHY

1. **Stay involved** in your care by going to all of your medical appointments.
2. Missed an appointment? **Call and reschedule** as soon as possible.
3. Taking HIV medications? **Do not miss a dose.**
4. Don't **know your CD4 and viral load?** Ask your doctor.
5. Don't be afraid to **ask questions!** For more information go to: <http://ohealthinfo.com/phs/about/dcepi/hiv/libehiv>

The choice to start HIV medication is also up to you. Ask your doctor if you have questions about starting HIV medication. After someone starts taking HIV medication, **treatment adherence** is very important.

Treatment Adherence

What does treatment adherence mean? Treatment adherence means **taking your medication exactly the way your doctor tells you.** HIV medicines works best when they are taken every day at the right times. It is important to continue taking your medication even if you are feeling healthy. Stopping and starting your medications will make them less effective or may cause resistance to the medications.

Barriers and Strategies

One of the most common reasons for people not taking their medication is because they simply forget. Setting an alarm to remind yourself of when to take your medicine will help you with treatment adherence. Keeping a diary log of when you took your medicine and when you took it will help you keep track day to day. If you have disclosed your HIV/AIDS status to a friend, peer, or family member, ask them to help you with remembering to take your medication.

Another reason for why people do not take their medication is that they feel healthy and do not feel sick. It is important to keep taking

If you find it hard to make it to your appointments, there are people that can help. You can find a list of agencies that can help you at <http://ohealthinfo.com/phs/about/dcepi/hiv/libehiv/services>

your medication, even if you feel good. HIV medication works best when you take it, as directed, every day.

Do you find it difficult to adhere to your treatment plan when you are away from home for long periods? Plan and take your medication with you. Using a pillbox will help you remember whether you have taken your medication that day.

If you are having problems adhering to your treatment plan, talk to your case manager, counselor, pharmacist, or doctor about how to address these issues. Your case manager can also help you find ways to talk to your doctor or pharmacist about your barriers. Your doctor or case manager can help you figure out what your options are to adhering to your treatment plan. Do not hesitate to contact your doctor if you have any questions.

Orange County Resources

The **HIV Client Advocacy Committee (HCAC)** meets monthly to discuss issues that affect how services are provided in the county. Are you a person living with HIV/AIDS and is interested in

making your voice heard about HIV services in Orange County? For more information about the HCAC, please call (714) 834-8711.

Peer Support Services (PSS) can help if you are looking for a peer to help you with treatment adherence, attend medical appointments, or just to talk. For more information on PSS, contact **Bobby Avalos** at (714) 868-1829 or e-mail bobbyonstage@hotmail.com.

Check out **HIV THRIVE** (hivthrive.com), if you are interested in improving your overall health and wellness through pharmaceutical care, diet, exercise, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Please contact **AIDS Services Foundation** at (949) 809-5700 or visit <http://www.ocasf.org/client-activities-2.html> for information on different support groups that may help you with treatment adherence.

For other events in Orange County, please visit <http://ohealthinfo.com/phs/about/dcepi/hiv/events>.

DID YOU KNOW...

1 in 5

People living with HIV in Orange County **do not know they have HIV**.*

2 in 5

People living with HIV in Orange County **have not seen a doctor in the last year**. **

3 in 5

People living with HIV in Orange County **do not have viral loads less than 200 copies per milliliter of blood**. ***

* CDC Estimated Back Calculation Methodology (0.21/ 0.79 x 6,674 diagnosed persons living with HIV)

** OC Unmet Need Estimate as of July 2010

*** OC HIV Case Registry as of December 2011

Orange County Goals

1. Help people who **just found out** they have HIV to get **medical care** within three months of when they found out
2. Keep persons living with HIV **in care**
3. Increase the number of persons living with HIV who have **suppressed viral loads** (less than 200 copies of the virus in a small amount (one milliliter) of blood)

ORANGE COUNTY HIV QUALITY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Our+Care OC is a project of the Orange County HIV Quality Management Committee and HIV Consumer Advocacy Committee. The HIV Quality Management Committee works to increase the quality of Ryan White services. For more information about the committee, please call (714) 834-8711. If you have feedback or topic suggestions for future newsletters, please contact **Melissa Corral** at MCorral@ochca.com.