ART and quality of life: side effects and long-term health

December 2015
HIV treatment (ART) uses very effective drugs with a low risk of side effects.

You and your doctor can choose and modify ART so that you have the best quality of life.

Side effects, if they occur, are usually mild. It is easy to change to other meds that might be easier to take.

Web links are for more information.
Everyone worries about side effects before starting...

- Most people either have no side effects or only have mild side effects that reduce within a few weeks.
- Choose ART that is most likely to fit your lifestyle.
- If you are unlucky and have trouble, it is easy to switch meds until the combination is right.

Key side effects

- **Rash**: Always tell your doctor.
- **Mood changes, being anxious, not sleeping well**: possible with all meds but especially efavirenz (also in Atripla).
- **Diarrhoea, fatigue and nausea**: possible with all but now less common; diarrhoea is more reported with protease inhibitors.
- **Changes to kidney and liver function, cholesterol, etc**: Possible with all meds but will be checked by routine tests.

*If side effects continue with one drug you can usually switch to another.*

i-base.info/ART
If you currently have side effects there are lots of things you can do that might help.

Take a list of things to talk about in your next clinic visit.
Talk about every side effect at every visit. Talk to the people you feel most confident with.

If you have had a problem for a while, don’t just put up with it.
People involved in your care can only help if they know you are having trouble.

...to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, GP & health worker.
Ask if you need more support so your clinic can help.

Call i-Base to speak to an advocate.

i-base.info/talk
A diary of your symptoms will help your doctor understand and take your problems seriously. It might also help you know if things are getting better.

- When and how often?
- How long do they last?
- How mild or severe?
- How is your daily life affected?

Use larger pages to record as many details as possible.

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Day        Time          Notes

i-base.info/diary
HIV and quality of life (QoL)

Good advice about lifestyle changes is just as important if you are HIV positive.

It includes looking after your heart and bones, your sexual health and your mental health.

The online resource also covers health issues other than side effects that are important as we grow older.

Looking after your health will help your quality of life whatever your age.

exercise

• Being active is good for your mental and physical health.

diet

• Eat a healthy balanced diet that includes vegetables. Go easy on salt, sugar, red meat, high fat and fried food.

sleep and rest

• Good sleep is essential.

• Alcohol and drug use is better in moderation.

• For HIV+ smokers, quitting is the single biggest way to improve your health.

i-base.info/QoL
The i-Base website has over 50 web pages on side effects and other health issues that are also available as a booklet. It includes information on:

- Talking to your doctor.
- Individual side effects.
- Quality of life.
- Other complications.

Information is all online or you can order the free booklet.

The more detailed information includes these side effects and other health issues.

- Diarrhoea.
- Feeling sick (nausea).
- Feeling tired (fatigue).
- Not sleeping well (insomnia).
- Neuropathy (numb fingers and toes).
- Mental health.
- Sexual health.
- Fat loss, body changes & diabetes.
- Liver, kidney and heart monitoring.
- Skin, nail and hair problems.
- HIV and cancer.
- Bone health.
Notes for next clinic visit

Taking a list of things you want to talk about will make the most of the time you have to see your doctor.

For the free full booklet please call 020 7407 8488 or order online.

We can answer questions by phone

0808 800 6013

or by email or online

Please give us feedback
surveymonkey.com/r/5J97ZN8

More than 350 full references:
www.i-base.info/references

i-Base, 57 Great Suffolk St, SE1 0BB.
“...after 22 years, I still take a list of things to discuss with my doctor.”

“Speaking to others gave me confidence to change from efavirenz.”

“... in the end, HIV meds were so much easier than I thought they would be...”

“...tell your doctor about drugs and supplements in case they interact with ART.”