



THE AIDS COCKTAIL (COMBINATION THERAPY)

What is the AIDS cocktail?

What people often call the AIDS cocktail is **combination therapy**. It is three or four different medicines people with HIV/AIDS take, at the same time, to keep them healthy or improve their health.

What these medicines are supposed to do

For most people these medicines do several things:

- ◆ Stop or slow down HIV from growing or multiplying in their body.
- ◆ Reduce the amount of HIV in their body.
- ◆ Give the body time to fix some of the damage HIV has caused to their immune system (the part of your body that fights germs).
- ◆ Make their immune system stronger and more able to protect them from germs or infections.

How you know it is working

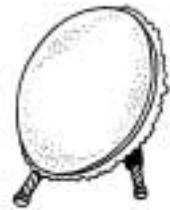
People who decide to take these medicines will feel some changes in their body or they will have more energy. They must see their doctor, nurse or CHR regularly. The health care worker will:

- ◆ Check their body for any signs of illness. If a nurse or CHR checks their body they will share that information with the doctor.
- ◆ Take blood to have it tested to see how well the medicine is fighting HIV.



Information for Inuit Community Members

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The kind of blood tests the doctor does

There are two main blood tests that doctors do to keep track of how HIV is affecting a person's body. Doctors will likely do other blood tests at the same time.

One test measures the number of **CD4 cells** or **T4 cells** in the body (these are the part of your immune system that help your body fight infections and other germs). The more CD4 cells a person has the stronger their immune system is and the less likely they are to get sick.

Another test is called a viral load test. **Viral load** means how much HIV is in a person's blood.

- ◆ If the medicines are working, the amount of HIV in a person's blood (viral load) should go down. It can take a few months before the test shows this.
- ◆ In time, the viral load test may not be able to find any HIV in a person's blood. This does not mean HIV is cured. It just means that the medicine has worked very well and HIV is not growing in the body.
- ◆ The longer a person's viral load remains low, the stronger their immune system becomes.

There are three different kinds or families of anti-HIV medicines that make up combination therapy or the AIDS cocktail. Doctors decide which medicines they think will work best for each different person. Not everyone who has HIV or AIDS takes the same medicine, so **never share medicine with someone else.**



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Common questions about the AIDS cocktail (combination therapy):

Q: Once the medicine starts working and a person feels better can they stop taking the combination therapy (AIDS cocktail)?

A: No. If a person with HIV stops taking their cocktail, HIV will start to grow again in their body. **Remember, the medicine is stopping HIV from growing.**

Q: If the medicine makes a person feel worse, should they stop taking it?

A: All medicines, including the medicines used to treat HIV, affect a person's body by causing certain feelings. These feelings are often called **side effects**. It is a good idea for a person to write down what kind of side effects they have and how long the side effects last so they can discuss them with a doctor, nurse or CHR. There may be ways to make the side effects easier to deal with. Most side effects go away after a short period of time. It is important to **remember that side effects are one of the signs that the medicine is fighting HIV in a person's body**. But if a person is having side effects that are making them feel sick, then they should go and talk to a doctor, nurse or CHR.

Credits

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This is one of a series of information updates for Inuit community members to learn more about the medicines and other kinds of treatments some people with HIV/AIDS use to fight HIV and AIDS. If you have questions or want more information, talk to your doctor, nurse or CHR.

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