7 Ways to Improve Adherence

Adherence isn’t easy for everyone. Sticking to a medication regimen can be tough, but here are some tips and tools that may help.

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1. Download an app.

There’s a smartphone app for just about everything these days, including managing your medications. These apps can be especially helpful when you’re juggling multiple pills—for HIV and perhaps other conditions—that have to be taken at different times of the day. For example, the free Care4Today app allows you to input all your medication information, including the correct dosage, so your phone will send you alerts whenever it’s time to take your meds.

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2. Get organized.

Getting a seven-day pill organizer is also a great old-school way to help with adherence. They

come in versions that allow you to separate your pills according to when in the day you need to take them. Check out your local drugstore or search online to order one. You might consider getting four weeks' worth of organizers so that each time you refill your meds, you can arrange them all into a month's worth of doses in a single sitting. Doing this will help remind you when it's time to refill meds, because you'll see that your last pill organizer is almost empty.

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3. Set reminders to refill and pick up your meds.

If you get your medications from a major pharmacy chain, like Walgreen's, Rite Aid or CVS, chances are the company has a text- and email-based alert system to remind you to refill your medications and will ping you when they're ready for pickup. You can also review all your meds through a smartphone app or pharmacy website to see, for example, when you're due for a refill.

The pharmacy might also let you arrange to have meds automatically refilled when it’s time. Some even offer home delivery. Visit your pharmacy’s website or ask your pharmacist to tell you about any computer or app-based options that are available to help you better adhere to your meds.

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4. Establish a routine.

Tying your pill taking to a daily routine, such as brushing your teeth or eating specific meals, is another helpful way to remember to take each dose. If you’re on a drug that needs to be taken with food and are eating on the go a lot, consider keeping a spare supply of meds in your bag or desk or tucking a small pill container into your pocket. For a handy, inconspicuous pill pouch, empty out a dental floss container.

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5. Don’t skip doses.

A common misconception among people taking antiretrovirals is that it’s better to skip doses when drinking or doing recreational drugs. Some HIV-positive people will intentionally do so because they think it’s safer not to mix such substances with ARVs. Clinicians say the real danger is in not taking your HIV meds. So the best plan is just to stick to your medication regimen.

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6. Discuss side effects with your doctor.

Sometimes the way HIV medication side effects impact people’s everyday lives can make them not want to take their pills as prescribed. It’s important to discuss any side effects you may experience with your doctor. If side effects wind up compromising your adherence, a switch to another medication with fewer side effects may help you adhere better.

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7. Take care of your mental health.

People suffering from mental illness, such as depression, are less likely to adhere well to their HIV medications. To seek treatment for mental health concerns, contact your local AIDS service organization or other health care or mental health professional

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