Pill Drill

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Yes, it’s true: Drugs work better when you take them. Researchers from the University of Nebraska and the VA Medical Center in Pittsburgh used electronic pill monitors to determine the precise relationship between adherence—popping pills as directed—and treatment outcome for PWAs. The results were striking. Compared to other areas of medicine —where 80 percent adherence to a drug regimen would be considered acceptable, and would normally result in treatment success—for those on HAART, taking meds as directed 80 to 90 percent of the time equaled failure (detectable viral load) in half of those tested. At 70 to 80 percent adherence, three-fourths had detectable virus. And even with 90 to 95 percent adherence, more than a third were unable to maintain undetectable viral loads. CD4 counts also correlated strongly with adherence, with higher counts clearly tied to more precision in pill popping.

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