Skipping HIV Meds While Abusing Drugs? Think Again

August 21, 2015

Believing that antiretrovirals and illicit drugs are a toxic mix, many people with HIV intentionally skip their ARVs when they plan to use such substances, aidsmap reports. Publishing their findings in the Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes, researchers designed a prospective study including 530 HIV-positive people on ARVs who were current illicit drug users.

On average, the participants adhered to their ARVs at a rate of 83 percent, just below the 85 percent threshold considered the minimum adherence rate for optimal viral suppression. Thirty-seven percent of the participants said they took less than 85 percent of their doses and one-quarter reported taking 75 percent of their doses.

Thirty-five percent of the cohort said they intentionally stopped their HIV treatment when they were taking drugs, with women more likely to skip doses than men. The researchers also found links between poor adherence and lower income, less education and a longer time spent with undiagnosed HIV.

Those who skipped ARV doses on purpose were more inclined to say they abused alcohol and that they had other problems related to alcohol abuse. What's more, 56 percent of those who intentionally skipped ARV doses when taking drugs did the same when drinking.

More than half of the group subscribed to three key faulty beliefs about supposed dangers of mixing ARVs with illicit drugs. Those who intentionally skipped ARVs took an average of 79 percent of their doses, while the others in the cohort adhered at a rate of 85 percent. As a likely consequence, one in three of those who skipped doses on purpose had a detectable viral load, while 22 percent of the rest of the study group did.

In other words, the real danger is not mixing HIV meds with coke, weed, or other such substances, but in not taking ARVs.

To read the aidsmap article, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/drugs-skipping-doses-27672-4008