



Making the Switch

Changing to long-acting injectables helped Eric Pfleider keep up with his HIV treatment.

April 3, 2023 By Charles Sanchez

“I am really into the most current and groundbreaking science,” said Eric Pfleider, 44. “I’m a big tech head and I like the newest, biggest, fastest thing available at the moment, so I like to try to keep up.”

That’s the biggest reason Pfleider, a native of Indianapolis, Indiana, and communications director for the [Sero Project](#), decided to make the switch from managing his HIV with a one pill, once a day cocktail to the newer, hipper once-every-two-month long-acting injectable medication Cabenuva (cabotegravir plus rilpivirine).

Made by ViiV Healthcare, Cabenuva is the first injectable to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration. It replaces the need for daily pill swallows with a six times per year injection administered by a medical professional.

He switched last June—even documenting his journey on TikTok—and hasn’t looked back. “It’s been really great,” he says. “Although I still have to deal with a pill box [for other medications], it’s nice to know that if I don’t take my pills for a few days, it’s not going to affect my HIV.” He added, “I may die from high blood pressure or from a stroke from having high cholesterol because I didn’t take my medication, but I won’t die from HIV, and I won’t transmit the virus.”

[@guaposdad](#) I’m documenting my switch from Triumeq to Cabenuva to treat my HIV. This was my first series of injections. I opted out of the one month oral lead in.

Cabenuva is a regimen of 2 shots: cabotegravir and rilpivirine. One is thicker than the other and hurt a little more than the other. [#HIV](#) [#Undetectable](#) [#uequalsu](#)

#cabenuva 🎵 Shots (feat. Lil Jon) - LMFAO

As far as side effects, Pfleider has been fortunate to experience very few. “I haven’t noticed any, except for some pain at the injection sites. And usually that lasts for about a week,” he said, “so there are seven good weeks out of the two months that I don’t hurt a bit. I didn’t have any headaches. I didn’t have any stomach issues. Since I never experienced any of those, I had a really sweet transition.”

One possible side effect of Cabenuva that worried Pfleider was depression. He was frank to say that he has mental health challenges that he takes medication for, so he consulted with his psychiatrist. “We had to adjust my mental health medication,” he said, “just so it would be more balanced if I experienced that side effect. Luckily, I didn’t experience very much of that.”

The switch in HIV medications also caused some changes in his blood work. “My nurse practitioner who handles my HIV care, she noticed a change in my viral load after the first set of injections.” His viral load had jumped from less than 20 copies to about 30, which is still considered undetectable and untransmittable. Also, his liver enzymes were elevated, but they’ve leveled off after a few injections.

Pfleider realizes that he’s fortunate to be able to have access the medication. “I recognize my privilege as a cis white male who lives in an urban area,” he said. “That allows me easy access to this form of treatment.”

He continued, “Cabenuva is not inexpensive. My employer does not offer insurance and I am unable to afford it on my own, so I use a marketplace insurance plan and Indiana’s Health Insurance Assistance Program (HIAP) as supplemental. On the other hand, if I did have insurance through my workplace, the likelihood of Cabenuva being on that insurance’s formulary is pretty low due to the high cost and the other options for treatment available.”

Still, Pfleider is glad to have been able to make the switch. “I’m a happy customer!” he said.