Half the Pills... Twice the Fun?

April 28, 2021 By Shawn Decker

A recent study suggests that it may be okay to take HIV medications four days a week, with three days off meds. Check out the article, and be sure to take the survey at the bottom of the page that asks whether or not you'd be interested in trying that treatment strategy.

I'm considering it. Again.

It's not hard to imagine, because from roughly 2005 to around 2015 or so, I was doing week on/week off with my HIV medication. In 2009 I wrote about what that was like. In recent years, I opted for uninterrupted treatment because the medications had gotten so much better than when I started on treatments back in 1999, when Viracept really welcomed me to the table by knocking my viral load from close to a million copies down to undetectable whilst reeking havoc on my stomach.

I had to switch to a different medication after just ten months on Viracept. Then again after two years on Sustiva when the mental side effects began to wear me down. That second combination is really what inspired me to consider a structured treatment interruption, as did a fiery speech at a memorial service in NYC. (Larry Kramer speaking at Stephen Gendin's memorial.)

These days, it feels like I've come full circle. My stomach, which hasn't caused me any continuous grief since those early Viracept days, has been wildly inconsistent for well over a year now. This recent study has gotten me thinking... is it time to return to a strategy that really worked for me?

To me, the answer is pretty simple: yes. Lately I've been thinking about switching meds- again- but perhaps trying this four days on, three days off first might be a better plan. Of course, I'll discuss it with my doctor, but the more I think about it the more I believe that it could be the answer to my tummy troubles. As always, quality of life dictates my decision-making when it comes to my health. I'm thankful for what the HIV medications do to keep HIV in check, and I'm not overly concerned about the virus making some kind of dramatic comeback in three days time when I regularly was off meds for seven days at a time for all those years.

Best case scenario? My stomach gets back in line and I can stay on my current regimen with a little break from the meds for a few days a week. Adherence becomes an even bigger deal with structured treatment interruptions, but I'm confident that I wouldn't miss scheduled doses, because I was pretty damn good at keeping track of the week on/week off routine I was on back in the day.

Worst case scenario? My stomach stays the same and I switch to another medication, uninterrupted. At least to start with.

We'll see how it goes if I get that green light from doc.

In any case, I hope this finds you well in your own journey.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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