

**MODERN ART FOR SOUTH AFRICA**

# **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Everyone with HIV  
needs to take HIV treatment  
– called antiretroviral  
therapy, ART or ARVs**

**NOVEMBER 2024**



# IS ART A CURE FOR HIV?

**NO.**



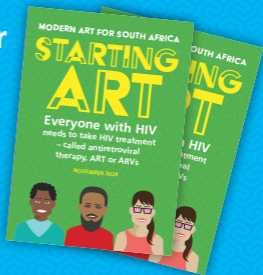
ART is a combination of drugs which control the virus.

We don't have a cure for HIV yet. People with HIV must take ART for the rest of their lives. ART will keep you healthy and able to enjoy a normal life.

# WHEN SHOULD I START ART?

Everyone who tests positive for HIV should start ART as soon as possible – even if you feel healthy or have a strong immune system.

*Read our booklet "Starting ART" to find out more.*



# DOES ART HAVE SIDE EFFECTS?

Yes, ART has side effects. They vary depending on which ART regimen you are on, and can be minor to severe.

The current first-line regimen (called TLD – tenofovir, lamivudine and dolutegravir in one pill) has been proven to have less severe side effects.





But some people experience nausea, vomiting, dizziness and headaches. These usually clear after a few days.

One common side effect with TLD that tends to last longer is insomnia. This can be resolved by taking your treatment in the morning. There are also cases of weight gain with TLD.

# WHAT HAPPENS IF I STOP TAKING ART?



The amount of virus in your body (viral load) will quickly multiply – sometimes in only a week – and go back to the level it was at before you started ART.

Your CD4 count – which indicates how strong your immunity is – will drop, quite fast for some people. A weaker immune system increases your chances of getting sick from an opportunistic infection.

# CAN I TAKE ART

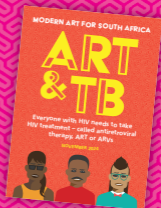
# WHILE I'M ON TB

# TREATMENT?

**Yes, you can take both ART and TB treatment.**

If newly diagnosed, you must be on TB treatment for two weeks before starting ART. An additional 50mg of dolutegravir is added if you are on TB treatment and TLD.

*Read our booklet "ART & TB" for more.*



# I AM PREGNANT, IS IT SAFE

## FOR ME TO TAKE ART OR PrEP?

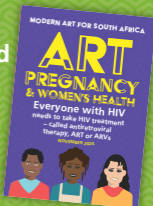
Yes. Pregnant people living with HIV need to be on ART in order to protect their own health and prevent the baby getting HIV. Pregnant people vulnerable to HIV should take PrEP to stop getting HIV during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

## IS IT SAFE TO BREASTFEED

### IF I AM HIV POSITIVE?

Yes. It is safe and recommended for all mothers to breastfeed whatever their HIV status.

*Read our booklet "ART, pregnancy & women's health" for more.*





## **CAN I TAKE MY ART AT DIFFERENT TIMES?**

Get into the habit of taking your ART at the same time each day so you do not forget.

Exactly what time is not that important, but getting into the habit of taking it every day is. If you forget to take it at the regular time, just take it as soon as possible. Try to get into a strong routine, and don't skip doses.

# **WHAT DOES AN**

# **UNDETECTABLE VIRAL**

# **LOAD MEAN?**

**ART works by reducing the amount of HIV to very low levels in the blood. This is called having an undetectable viral load or being undetectable.**

**It is measured by a viral load test. When you have less than 50 copies (or 200, depending on the test), your levels of HIV are so low that the virus cannot be passed on. PLEASE NOTE: this does not mean that you don't have the virus anymore.**

**I USUALLY GET ACRIPTEGA  
AND THIS TIME THEY  
GAVE ME REYDIN.  
IS IT SAFE FOR ME  
TO TAKE THIS?**

**Yes, Acriptega and  
Reydin are both  
versions of TLD.**

**They have different  
names, branding  
and colour because  
they are made  
by different  
companies.**





# **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ORIGINATOR DRUGS AND GENERIC VERSIONS?**

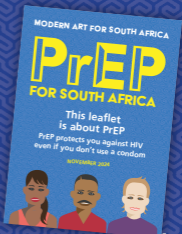
**Generic medicines cost less than the original versions of drugs.**

The pills might look different, but they have the same active ingredients and work just as well. They also have the same risk of side effects.

## WHAT IS PrEP?

PrEP stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis. It is a combination of two ARVs, and protects people without HIV from getting HIV. When taken every day, PrEP stops HIV from multiplying and taking hold within the body.

*Read our booklet "PrEP for South Africa".*



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## CAN I BUY PrEP OR ART FROM A PHARMACY?

Yes, but you will need a prescription to be able to buy PrEP for prevention, or ART for treatment.

# **CAN I TAKE TRADITIONAL MEDICINES (IMBIZA) IF I AM ON ART?**



No. We do not know how it will interact with ART as it has not been studied properly. Only take medicines prescribed to you at the health facility.

# **CAN IMMUNE BOOSTERS HELP INCREASE MY CD4 COUNT?**

No. There is no such thing as an immune booster. Companies might claim this in advertising, but none of these products has been proven to work. The only thing that can help improve your CD4 count is to take ART regularly.

**HOW CAN I GET A**

**LONGER SUPPLY OF ARVs?**

You can get a 3-month supply of ARVs at the clinic where your first viral load result is shared with you.

This is about 4 months into treatment, and as long as you are not sick.

You can get a 6-month prescription if you have a low viral load (or suppressed viral load), and can ask for it immediately when you get your low viral load test results.

Ask your doctor or nurse for these longer supply options.



Find out more at  
[modernartforsouthafrica.co.za](http://modernartforsouthafrica.co.za)



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