

# UNDERSTANDING

## The experience of living with HIV starts with learning more

HIV, or the human immunodeficiency virus, is a virus that is spread between people through the exchange of blood or other bodily fluids. Once inside the human body, it begins to weaken the immune system—your body's natural defense system. It does this by attacking the cells that help fight infection, and, over time, can develop into AIDS.

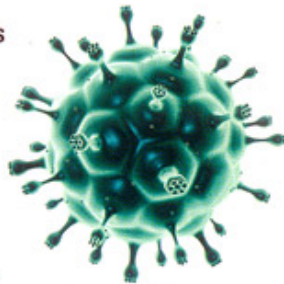


Image of HIV Virus

### The difference between HIV and AIDS

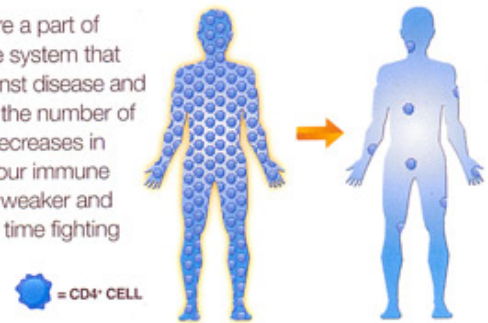
HIV	AIDS
HIV is the virus that can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).	AIDS is a group of symptoms and diseases associated with the damage HIV does to the immune system.

Having HIV doesn't mean you have AIDS. In fact, when properly treated and managed under a doctor's supervision, HIV infection may not progress into AIDS.

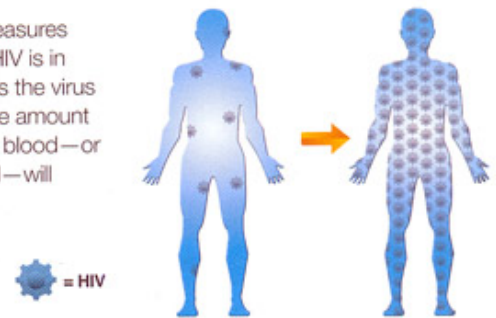
## Important tests for HIV treatment

CD4<sup>+</sup> cell count and viral load are 2 tests that a healthcare professional often uses to find out when it's time to start HIV treatment and see how well therapy is working.

CD4<sup>+</sup> cells are a part of your immune system that defends against disease and infection. As the number of these cells decreases in your body, your immune system gets weaker and has a harder time fighting infection.



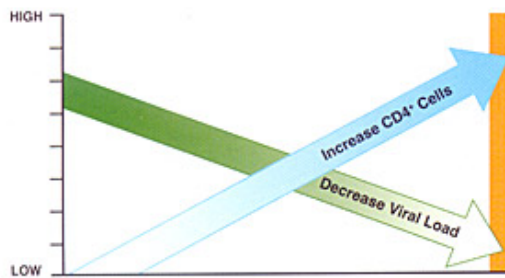
Viral load measures how much HIV is in the blood. As the virus develops, the amount of HIV in the blood—or the viral load—will increase.



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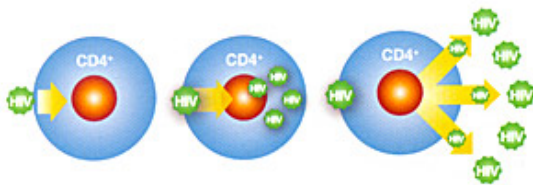
## Managing HIV with medication

Taking medication is another important part of the experience of living with HIV. HIV medications can help lower your viral load and keep your HIV under control over the long term.



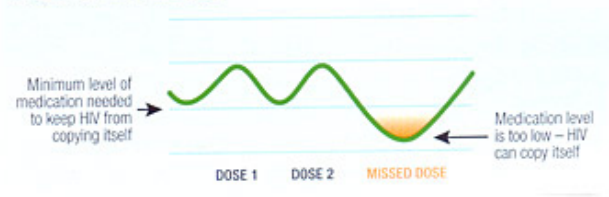
## Taking your HIV medication

- HIV medication is meant to slow the spread of the HIV virus. Without medication, the HIV virus can quickly copy itself and spread.



- Skipping even one dose can allow the HIV virus to copy itself. The virus could stop responding to a medication, or an entire class of medications (see below for explanation of medication classes).

## MEDICATION LEVEL



## What is a medication class?

Class refers to groups of medications that work the same way to treat the HIV virus. The four different classes are:

