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Is there a cure for HIV/AIDS?

No. There is no cure for HIV or for AIDS.



The Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, a program of the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), provides information resources on HIV prevention, care and treatment as well as a range of other HIV/AIDS information.

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The medications used to treat HIV infections are called Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Therapies (HAART). These therapies are a mixture of medications such as AZT, 3TC, dDI and protease inhibitors; they work by slowing down the body's production of HIV but these **DO NOT** get rid of HIV or cure AIDS. The medications help to reduce the level of HIV in the blood, to make the immune system stronger and to keep some people healthy longer.

Even though the HAART medications are better than any other treatment so far, there are some problems:

- they do not work for everyone
- some people have very bad side effects from these medications or from the way they mix with other drugs they are taking—many have had to stop treatment due to intolerable side effects and/or interactions
- the medications cost thousands of dollars each year, an amount many cannot afford
- the treatment requires people to take many pills each day, for the rest of their lives—if they forget to take the pills, the virus (HIV) can mutate, get stronger, and become resistant to medication
- we do not know the long-term effects of these medications or how well they will work over time
- not all the people who need treatment have access to it. (An Ontario study found that only half of the people living with HIV/AIDS are getting HAART. Other research shows that certain groups, such as women and those who inject drugs, are less likely to get this treatment.)

Is prevention still necessary?

The success of HAART is good news for the people living longer, better lives because of it, but the availability of treatment has made some believe that preventing HIV infection is no longer important. This belief has led to many engaging in or relapsing into risk-taking behaviours. We must remember that HIV medications **DO NOT** stop infections and thus do not make it safe to stop

preventative behaviours. In fact, there are more people living with HIV for longer, making safety more important than ever.

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS. To reduce the risk of getting or transmitting HIV, you still need to practice safer sex and to not share needles (or other injecting or tattooing and piercing equipment), even when taking HIV medication (see Question 11 “How can I have sex more safely?”).

For more information, contact your local AIDS service organization or health care practitioner.

For more copies of this fact sheet or other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the
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