

AOD use and ART adherence: what you need to know

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is one of the most powerful tools available for people living with HIV. When taken consistently, it keeps the virus suppressed, protects your immune system, and means you can live a long and healthy life. But like many things in life, it doesn't always happen in a perfectly straight line – and for some people, alcohol and other drug use can make staying on top of treatment more challenging.

This resource is here to give you honest, practical information so you can make informed choices about your health, without judgement and without pressure.

How can AOD use affect ART adherence?

There are a few ways that substance use can interact with treatment routines:

- **Disrupted routines** – When using, it can be easy to lose track of time, miss doses, or simply forget. For some people, days of use can mean days without medication.
- **Side effects** – Some substances can intensify the side effects of ART, making it feel harder to tolerate medication and tempting to skip it.
- **Pharmacy and appointment access** – Heavy or dependent use can sometimes make it harder to keep medical appointments or collect prescriptions consistently.
- **Mental health** – Anxiety, depression, or come-downs after use can affect motivation and energy levels, including the ability to stay on top of a daily medication routine.

Why does missing doses matter?

ART works best when taken consistently. Missing doses – especially over a period – can allow the virus to replicate, which may reduce how well your treatment works and, in some cases, can lead to drug resistance. That said, an occasional missed dose is not a crisis. What matters most is getting back on track as soon as possible and talking to your healthcare provider if you are finding adherence difficult, there are different kind of treatments and you can decided with your doctor which one suits you better.



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Some practical strategies that can help

- Keep your medication somewhere visible and easy to access as part of your daily routine – when possible.
- Use phone alarms or medication reminder apps to help stay on track
- If you know you are going into a period of heavier use, plan ahead – let a trusted friend know, or speak to your doctor or peer navigator beforehand
- Consider a weekly pill organiser so it is easy to see at a glance whether you have taken your dose
- If you have missed doses, don't panic – simply take your next dose as scheduled and continue from there. If missed doses are becoming a pattern, speak with your doctor about treatment options or strategies that may work better for you.

You don't have to manage this alone

If you are finding it hard to balance AOD use and your treatment, you are not the first person to experience this and you won't be the last. Speaking openly with a trusted healthcare provider, peer navigator, or support service can make a real difference.

Queensland Positive People (QPP) can connect you with peer support from people who truly understand. Self-refer at www.qpp.org.au/self-referral and we will help you find the right support for your situation.

