

Part Two
Common problems in people aging with HIV

Chapter 4
Too many pills

Section I. Too many pills and its importance

4-1. How many is too many?

People tend to have more diseases as they age. As a result, many people aging with HIV take many pills. The correct number of pills for each person is different. This depends on the diseases they have. Sometimes, all the pills you take are needed. At other times, one pill can be too many if any of the following happens:

- a. *It is not the right pill:* Some people do not use the right pill for their disease. For example, some people use cold medicine to help them sleep, even if they do not have a cold. This is because cold medicine has a side effect of making people sleepy. This is wrong. Sleep aid should be used for problem sleeping, not cold medicine.
- b. *It is not needed:* Not every illness needs to be treated with pills. For example, back pain can get better with massages instead of pills. Also, some pills are not needed after a time. For example, antibiotics (pills that kill germs) are only needed for a few days.
- c. *It stops other pills from working well:* A pill can clash or interact with another pill you are taking. Sometimes, it can make the other pill weak and not active against the disease. Other times, it can make the other pill too strong, causing you to be sick from side effects.
- d. *It makes you sick:* Many pills have side effects that can make you sick. For example, many blood pressure pills can hurt your kidneys.

4-2. The importance of taking the correct number of pills

Taking too many pills can cause 3 problems. First, it is hard to take a lot of pills correctly. Second, the more pills you take, the more side effects you may have. Third, the more pills you take, the more they are likely to clash with one another.

Section II. Too many pills: what to do with your doctor

4-3. Go over your pill list

Go over your pill list every time you see your doctor. Bring all pill bottles to the doctor's visit. This includes over-the-counter or herbal pills. Ask your doctor if any pill should be stopped or changed. This will keep you and your doctor on the same page about the correct pills you should be taking.

4-4. Talk to your doctor when your pill list changes

Tell your doctor every time you start, stop, or change pills. This helps your doctor make sure your pills do not clash with one another. When starting a new pill, use the lowest amount possible. This way, if you have side effects, they will not be so strong.

4-5. If you get sick, ask if it might be from one of your pills

If you get sick after starting a pill, ask if your illness can be a side effect of that pill. If a pill is making you sick, ask to see if you can take a different pill. This way, the illness can be stopped at its source, by stopping the pill that causes it.

Section III. Too many pills: what to do on your own

4-6. Take pills correctly

Take the right amount of pills at the right time of day. If this is difficult, use a pillbox or ask someone to remind you. This is really important for your HIV pills. If you do not take pills correctly, your HIV pills may stop working in the future.

4-7. Ask your pharmacy for help

Your pharmacy can help you with many things. Most pharmacists can help answer questions you may have about your pills. Some pharmacies can help you take pills correctly by sorting them into plastic packages, called *blister packs*. All you have to do is open the packs and take the pills inside, no sorting needed. If you can, find a pharmacy that has worked with people with HIV. They have more experience making sure your pills do not clash and helping you take HIV pills on time.