

How are injectable ARVs used?

Q Dear Doctor, I am in a discordant relationship; my partner is positive while I am negative. He is on ARVs and we have been talking about long acting injectable ARVs. Are they for treatment or prevention?

Gloria

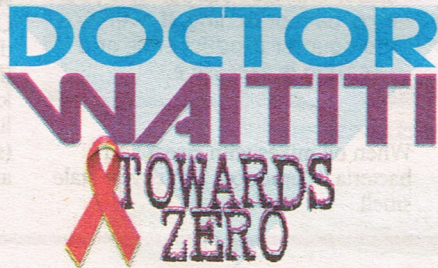
A Dear Gloria, ARVs like the injectable long acting tenacipivir and others can be used to prevent HIV infection when given as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to people who are HIV negative but in discordant relationships like you are and others like sex workers who are at high risk of being exposed to the infection. ARVs can also be given as post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) after someone has been exposed for example in cases of rape or needle pricks.

The same medicine is what is used as treatment when given to people already infected with the virus. It is important that the medicine, whether used for prevention or treatment, is used after being prescribed by a qualified health service provider and taken following instructions given to avoid

abuse. In your case, if your partner is on ARVs and his viral load is undetectable, then you should be safe; because an undetectable viral load is undetectable.

However, we encourage people to use more than one prevention method if possible; which is known as "combination prevention" in order to exploit the synergy or interaction of the two or more methods for better outcomes. So, you can use condoms, which also prevent unwanted pregnancy and other sexually transmitted infections such as hepatitis B and syphilis, even when your partner is on ARVs and has an undetectable viral load.

Indeed, you can also use PrEP, if deemed necessary by your health service provider; for example, when you want to get pregnant and have to have to practice unprotected



sex even when your partner is on ARVs but his viral load is undetectable or you wish to use more than one prevention method as explained above. Therefore, in your case it is important that you keep discussing both treatment and prevention options with your health service provider. That is what is known as "self-management", which is very important in chronic care since antiretroviral therapy (ART) is treatment for life. We encourage all people to have "health literacy", which enables individuals to find and utilize information about health, so that they can make informed decisions about their health and that of others.

Those on treatment like people with HIV need "treatment literacy", which means understanding a disease and its treatment, such as the science behind it, including treatment regimens and common side effects.