

Does changing time a person takes his or her ARVs matter?

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Dear Doctor,
My sister, who has been on ARVs for over 10 years, recently discovered that her viral load was no longer undetectable like it has always been. A friend told her it could be because she started taking her medicine in the evening instead of swallowing it in the mornings like she had always done. She started taking ARVs in the evening after she got a job that required her to work at night. When she takes the ARVs in the evening, it causes her to have no sleep while on duty.

Hilda

A Dear Hilda,
Adherence to ARVs does not only mean taking the medicine in the right doses and at the right time, as prescribed by healthcare providers.

Adherence also refers to the way one specifically takes the medicine, following dietary restrictions if any and other lifestyle changes as advised by the healthcare provider. The aim is to maintain a steady and optimum concentration of the medicine in the blood that is required for suppression of the virus to undetectable levels.

Therefore, if your sister prefers taking the medicine in the evening, because possibly one of the side effects of the medicine is insomnia, or lack of sleep; it does not matter as long as the medicine is taken regularly at the same time.

However, changing the time at which one takes his or her medicine from time to time is not good practice, because it does

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not help maintain a steady concentration of the medicine in the body. The most likely cause for her viral load to go up after being suppressed by the medicine, may be a change in her lifestyle, which includes her diet, alcohol consumption or even taking other medicine, including herbal remedies for different medical conditions that might be interfering with the ARVs. That is why it is important for people living with HIV who are on ARVs to disclose their HIV status, including their drug history, to healthcare providers who may be treating them for other medical conditions besides HIV.

Lastly, it is important for all people living with HIV that have to take medicines daily or regularly to have treatment literacy, which means understanding key aspects of HIV like how it affects the body, the basic science of ARVs and how they work to help them, plus some common side effects of the medicine.

