

Quick Tips for Positive Types

JUST WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



CNS Effects



What are they & why do they matter?

CNS stands for “Central Nervous System.” This includes the brain and spinal cord - the main control centre for the body and its functions. HIV can have different effects on the central nervous system. CNS effects may be caused by HIV itself, the treatments you are taking, or opportunistic infections caused by the disease.

Some of the CNS effects include:

- ◆ drowsiness, feeling “stoned”
- ◆ insomnia
- ◆ anxiety, nervousness, mood swings or depression
- ◆ dizziness, confusion, headache
- ◆ vivid or unusual dreams
- ◆ unusual or aggressive behaviour
- ◆ loss of concentration
- ◆ delusions
- ◆ dementia

Why do they matter?

CNS effects can be upsetting. They can interfere with sleep and daily functioning. Depression is a common CNS effect in people with HIV. Depression can make it difficult to take medications as prescribed. It should be treated immediately.

If you are starting an antiretroviral drug that is known to cause CNS effects, it might help to make some adjustments in your lifestyle for a few days, while your body adapts. For example, your doctors may recommend:

- ◆ reducing demands at work or at home for a few days.
- ◆ starting treatment on the weekend, or taking a few days off work.
- ◆ avoiding driving or operating heavy machinery, at least until the effects go away.

QuickTip:

Before starting a new drug, tell your doctor if you have ever had a psychological illness. Such illnesses may include depression, anxiety, substance abuse, or psychosis. This will help your doctor to monitor you to see if you are reacting to the drugs you are taking.



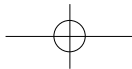
Managing CNS effects

Talk to your doctor if you are having any of the CNS effects listed above. It is important to determine the cause of the CNS effects, so an appropriate solution can be chosen.

If the CNS effects are being caused by a new antiretroviral drug you are taking, your doctor may recommend:

- ◆ taking your drugs before bed, so you don't experience the effects as much when you are awake.
- ◆ avoiding alcohol and recreational drugs - these can worsen CNS effects.
- ◆ a review of the medications you are taking.

It is important that you continue taking your drugs. Most CNS effects will go away once your body adjusts to the new drug regimen.



Other suggestions for managing CNS effects include:

- ◆ Making sure you are getting enough sleep, in order to avoid fatigue.
- ◆ Practicing relaxation techniques (e.g. meditation, visualization) to help reduce anxiety.
- ◆ Using written reminders such as Post-it* notes, agendas or calendars, if you are having trouble concentrating.
- ◆ Taking over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol*) or ibuprofen (Advil*, Motrin*) to help control headaches - be sure to speak with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any medications.
- ◆ Involving your support network of family members or friends during your first week of therapy.

Some medications may interact with your antiretroviral drugs. This could prevent them from fighting HIV as well as they should. Always talk to your doctor or pharmacist before using any medications or supplements, including those you can get without a prescription.



When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor, or go to your nearest emergency health centre right away if:

- ◆ the CNS effects do not go away and are interfering with your daily life and judgment; or
- ◆ your symptoms become serious. For example, if you have violent behaviour or thoughts of suicide.

Always let your doctor know if you have any CNS effects. Symptoms such as anxiety or depression should be treated as soon as possible. Your doctor may refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist for treatment.

*CNS effects may be caused by HIV or the drugs used to fight it.
Talk to your healthcare team about any CNS effects you experience
- they can help.*

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