

Quick Tips for Positive Types

JUST WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



Hypersensitivity



What is it & why does it matter?

“Hypersensitivity” is a reaction, like an allergy. Drugs can cause hypersensitivity reactions in some people. This includes drugs used to fight HIV. Hypersensitivity reactions to anti-HIV drugs usually start with a rash or “flu-like” symptoms, such as fever or nausea.

Recognizing Symptoms

Let your doctor know right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- ◆ rash
- ◆ fever
- ◆ nausea
- ◆ vomiting
- ◆ diarrhea
- ◆ abdominal pain
- ◆ severe fatigue (e.g. feeling lethargic or general discomfort)
- ◆ severe body aches
- ◆ cough, sore throat and occasional shortness of breath

Why does it matter?

Hypersensitivity reactions can progress quickly. They can involve multiple internal organs, including the liver, kidney or lungs. Many reactions are mild. However, in some cases they can be severe. Severe cases can lead to organ failure, or even death.



Managing hypersensitivity reactions

Before beginning any new drugs, ask your doctor or pharmacist if any of them can cause hypersensitivity reactions. Make sure you understand the dosage instructions for all drugs you are taking.

Only a few people experience hypersensitivity reactions. There is no good way to determine who will have a reaction. The only way to know is to try the drug, and watch for any symptoms. If you have any of the symptoms listed, it is important to act quickly. Call your doctor right away or go to your nearest emergency health centre. Bring a list of all of the drugs you are taking.

QuickTip:

If you have ever had a hypersensitivity reaction before, make sure to let your doctor and pharmacist know. You should never re-start a drug that you had a reaction to before.

It's important to be aware that symptoms usually don't start right away. **It usually takes at least a week for a hypersensitivity reaction to occur, but sometimes it can take as long as six weeks.** So, even if you have been taking a drug for some time, you should let your doctor know right away if you have any of these symptoms.

If your doctor thinks you are having a hypersensitivity reaction, he or she will tell you whether you should stop or change your drugs. If it is not a hypersensitivity reaction, the drugs may be continued, and the symptoms may go away on their own over 1 or 2 weeks.

Your doctor may also prescribe drugs such as antihistamines or corticosteroids, to help minimize the reaction and soothe your skin. To help prevent itching, you may want to try hypoallergenic moisturising creams or bathing in baking soda or oatmeal.

However, in cases of severe or dangerous hypersensitivity reactions, the drug **must** be stopped right away. It should **never** be re-started. This also includes medications that may contain the drug in combination with other active ingredients. The symptoms should start to go away 2-3 days after you stop taking the drug.

Remember: always talk to your doctor before making any changes to your drug regimen.



When should I call my doctor?

Always let your doctor know if you have any of the possible signs of a hypersensitivity reaction listed. This is especially important if you have started a new drug in the last few weeks.

*If you have started a new drug in the last few weeks,
watch for rash, fever, or flu-like symptoms.
They could be signs of a hypersensitivity reaction.*

*Reactions can be serious, and they can progress quickly.
Contact your doctor right away*