

The image features two hands clasped together in a supportive grip, with the fingers interlaced. The hands are positioned centrally, with one hand slightly above the other. The background is a soft, light teal color. Overlaid on the image is the text 'THE FACTS' at the top in a bold, teal, sans-serif font. Below this, the main title 'MONITORING YOUR HEALTH' is written in a large, bold, white, sans-serif font, centered between two horizontal white lines. The overall composition is clean and professional, suggesting a focus on health and well-being.

**THE FACTS**

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**MONITORING  
YOUR HEALTH**

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## MONITORING YOUR HEALTH

Once you have been given your HIV diagnosis, your HIV doctor will do regular tests to check your health and make sure that your treatments are working. They will also ask you about side effects and your health.

### **Common tests are:**

#### **Viral load test**

The viral load test measures the amount of HIV in your blood. It is an important measure of your health. It also shows how well your treatment is working. Your viral load should go down when you start taking your treatment.

Most people who take their treatment as prescribed will reach an **undetectable viral load**. This means that the level of HIV in your blood is so low that it cannot be detected (found) in the viral load test. Tests used in Australia can detect a viral load as low as 20-50 copies/ml.

If you have an undetectable viral load, little (if any) damage will be happening to your immune system. Having an undetectable viral load does not mean you are cured. If you stop taking your treatment the amount of virus in the blood will begin to rise.

If you are taking your medication as prescribed and you have a detectable viral load then speak to your doctor. You may need a different treatment or there may be some other cause.

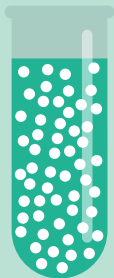
## CD4 count

CD4 cells are an important part of your immune system. They are damaged by HIV if it is NOT treated. The CD4 count measures the number of CD4 immune cells in a millilitre of your blood.

- 500 to 1,350 CD4 is the 'normal' range for adults. At this level there is little or no immune system damage.
- Between 500 and 250 CD4 shows there is some damage to your immune system. It is unlikely you will be at risk of major opportunistic infections.
- Fewer than 250 CD4 shows more serious immune system damage. You are at risk of serious illness.

**Normal range**  
**>500 CD4**

*Little or no damage  
to immune system*



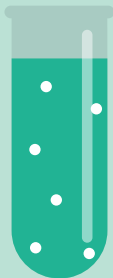
**Some damage**  
**500-250 CD4**

*Not likely to be at risk  
of serious illness*



**Serious damage**  
**<250 CD4**

*At risk of  
serious illness*



If you have a low CD4 count, this should increase once you start treatment. Upon starting treatment, your CD4 count should return to within the normal range.

### **Resistance testing**

Some types of HIV don't respond to some medications. These are called drug-resistant strains. A blood test is done before you start treatment to find out if you have a drug-resistant strain. This helps your doctor choose the best medication for you. Your doctor may also check drug resistance if your treatment isn't working.

### **Testing for side effects**

Although most modern HIV medications have few side effects, sometimes they can have serious side effects. It is important that your doctor checks for these and looks after your health. It is also important that you talk to your doctor about any side effects. Your doctor might do the following tests:

- Cholesterol and triglyceride (blood fats) levels, to prevent heart disease
- Glucose (blood sugar) levels, to test for diabetes
- Liver function tests to measure how well your liver is working
- Kidney function tests to measure how well your kidneys are working
- A full blood count to test for anaemia and other problems with your blood.

### **Screening for cervical cancer**

Women and anyone with a cervix living with HIV are at higher risk of cervical cancer. If you are living with HIV you should have the *Cervical Screening Test* every three years instead of every five years. The test looks for the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) which can lead to cancer.

You can get a cervical screen at your GP (doctor), a family planning clinic or a women's or community health service. You don't need to tell the person who is performing your screen about your HIV. However, if they don't know why you need to have the test every three years, you may be charged for them or you might not receive timely reminders of the date of your next screening test.

### **Other HPV related cancers**

The Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) can also cause cancers of the anus, throat and penis. Men and women living with HIV are at higher risk of these cancers. Treatment is very effective if it starts early. Speak to your doctor about checking for HPV related cancers.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### *Next Steps*

A guide for people newly diagnosed with HIV. It provides a guide to living with HIV. It is available as a booklet from your HIV clinic or HIV community organisation or it can be downloaded from [www.hivnextsteps.org.au](http://www.hivnextsteps.org.au)

### *HIV Tests and Treatments*

An Australian website with accurate, up to date and easy to understand information about managing and treating HIV. [www.hivtnt.org.au](http://www.hivtnt.org.au)

### *Treat HIV Now*

A website about HIV treatments aimed at gay men and men who have sex with men. [www.treathivnow.org.au](http://www.treathivnow.org.au)

### *Your Body Blueprint for HIV and Healthy Living*

An informative Australian website which gives accurate, up to date and easy to understand information on health and wellbeing for people living with HIV. It has information on living well with HIV for women and men of all ages. [www.yourbodyblueprint.org.au](http://www.yourbodyblueprint.org.au)

Content is adapted with permission from Queensland Positive People's Peer Navigation Program.