ARV Interrupted

What happens if individuals with HIV skip or stop antiretroviral therapy?

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Many people with HIV may think about how wonderful it would be if they didn't have to take daily antiretroviral (ARV) medication. One man, Steve, age 53, who has lived with the virus for almost 30 years, fantasizes that his positive test result years ago was a mistake. "I hate taking all these meds every day!" he says.

Steve's biggest beef was the nausea and headaches his ARVs caused. But these side effects, as well as other common issues, such as diarrhea and dizziness, are often short-term and can be minimized with other meds.

For some, a daily pill regimen can become tiresome and depressing.

But Steve knows that stopping therapy would have serious consequences. When an individual interrupts HIV treatment, the virus becomes harder to manage and more resistant to meds and can rise to a detectable level, leading to progression of the disease once his or her CD4 count drops. (CD4s are special cells that find and destroy harmful bacteria and viruses in the body.)

Overburdened by HIV? Talk to your doctor now.

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