

Talking about Viral Load- Activity Cards



<https://bit.ly/3kAv8GG>

This set of 9 cards can be used with groups or individuals to talk about living with HIV and managing viral load. The cards have been created for young people and those who support them using the experiences of young people living with HIV from Zimbabwe.

You can use the whole set of cards or use one card at a time.

Read through the quote and use the questions to have a discussion on viral load testing, the importance of viral suppression and the benefits that it can bring.

When you have completed the discussion, use the final cards to summarise how understanding and managing viral load can contribute to **Health, Happiness and Hope** for young people living with HIV.

Remember to use the animations to share more information with young people about viral load.

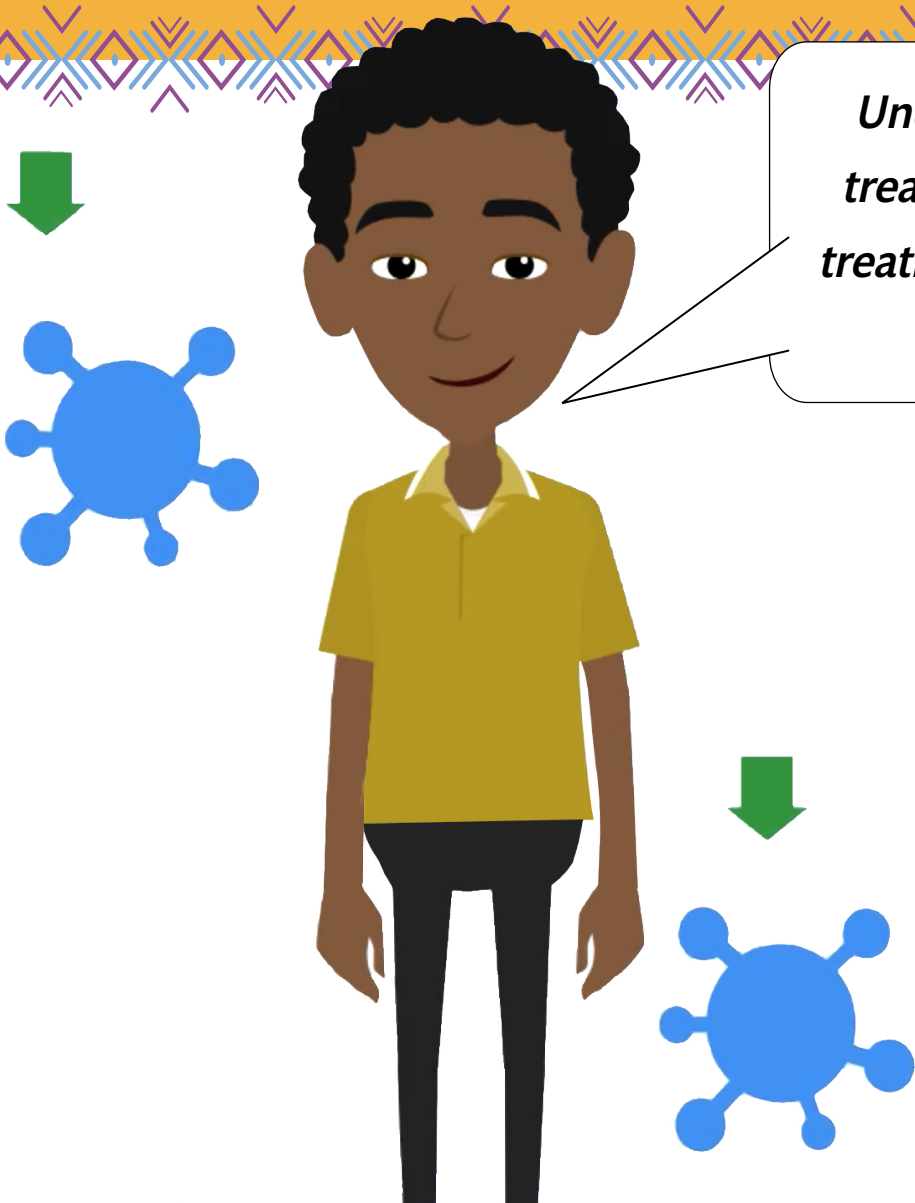


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Zvandiri


11-12 Stoneridge Way North, Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe
+263 242 335 805 info@africaaid-zvandiri.org
Africaid Zvandiri @zvandiri www.africaaid-zvandiri.org





Understanding that I can control the virus by taking my treatment makes me happy. It has helped me to trust my treatment and the information that I am given. I now know that it is possible to live a normal life with HIV.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean when HIV is suppressed?
 - Why is it important to do a viral load test regularly?
 - Do you know how often you should have a viral load test?
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UNDETECTABLE

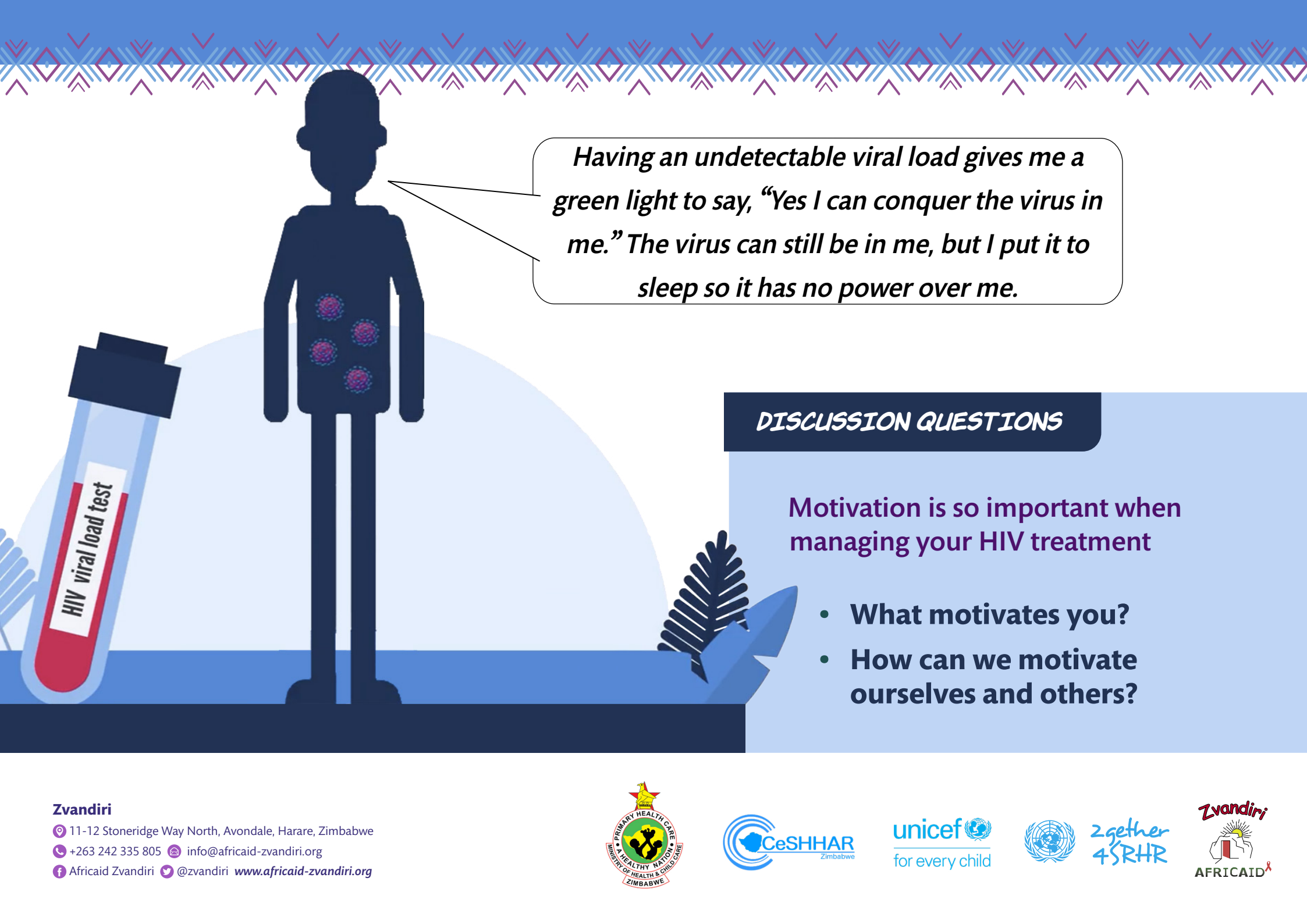
Zvandiri

📍 11-12 Stoneridge Way North, Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe

☎ +263 242 335 805 📧 info@afraid-zvandiri.org

🌐 Africaid Zvandiri 📱 @zvandiri 🌐 www.afraid-zvandiri.org





Having an undetectable viral load gives me a green light to say, “Yes I can conquer the virus in me.” The virus can still be in me, but I put it to sleep so it has no power over me.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Motivation is so important when managing your HIV treatment

- What motivates you?
- How can we motivate ourselves and others?

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When I feel unmotivated, I ask for support from my mum and my peer supporter. They help me to stay on track so that I can get a low viral load result next time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What challenges do young people face with managing their viral load?
- If you get a high viral load result, who can you ask for support?
- What else can you do to ensure your viral load is low?

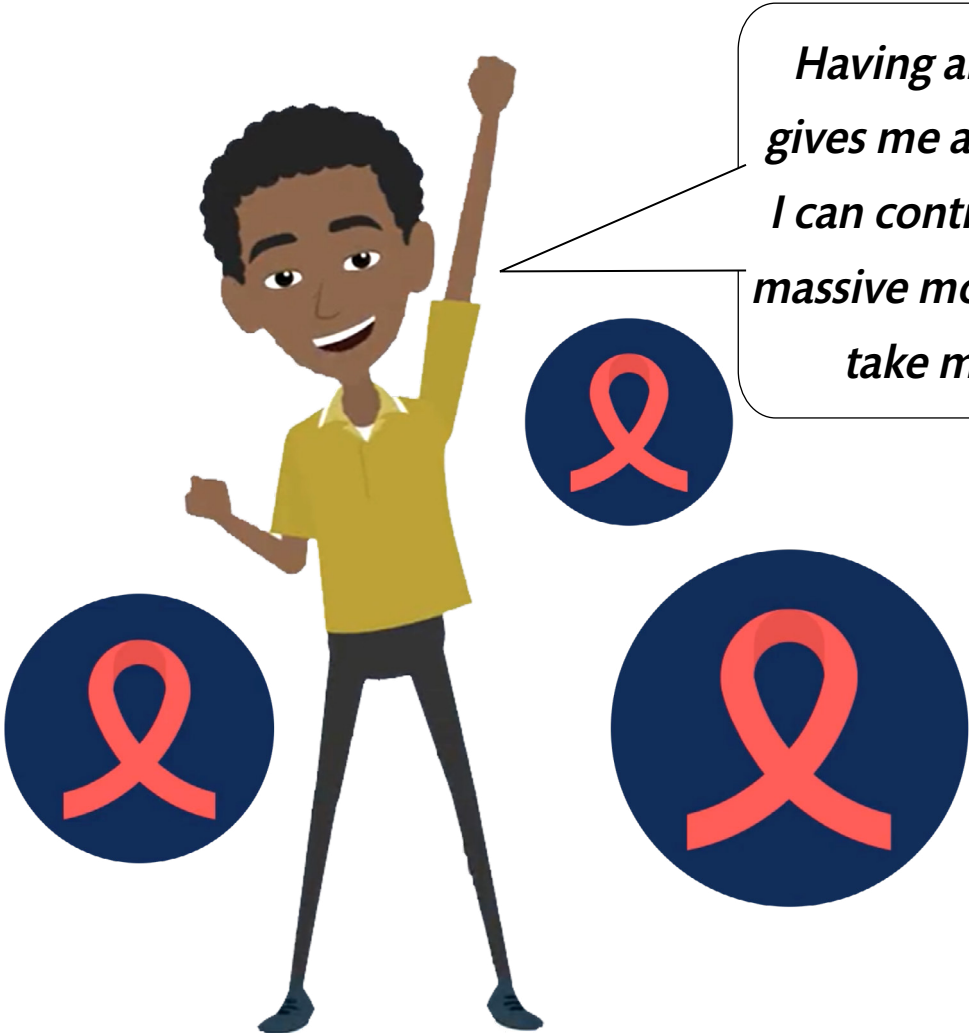
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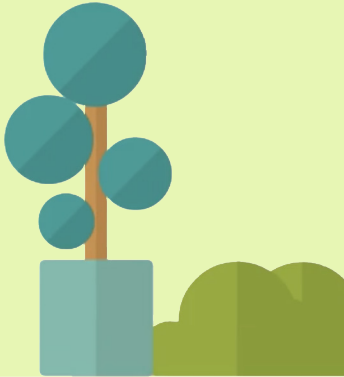
📱 Africaid Zvandiri 🌐 @zvandiri www.africaaid-zvandiri.org





Having an undetectable viral load gives me a sense of victory. I feel like I can control it, I can own it! This is a massive motivation to keep going and take my treatment everyday.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does having an 'undetectable' viral load mean?
 - What would having an undetectable viral load mean to you?
- 

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🌐 Africaid Zvandiri 📱 @zvandiri 🌐 www.afraid-zvandiri.org





Getting an undetectable result is an amazing moment. I can see that the treatment works because I gain weight and look and feel better.

But it also creates happiness about the possibilities for the future. It gives me the motivation to change other things too to be even healthier. I think, “okay, now I’ll stop smoking, or I’ll start eating better”.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- **What changes would being undetectable make in your life?**



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When I look at myself in the mirror and see that I am looking great it is exciting. Knowing that I am making my treatment work really well because I take it everyday gives me a feeling that I own everything. It shows me that I am someone important.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- **What is the best thing for you about feeling healthy?**



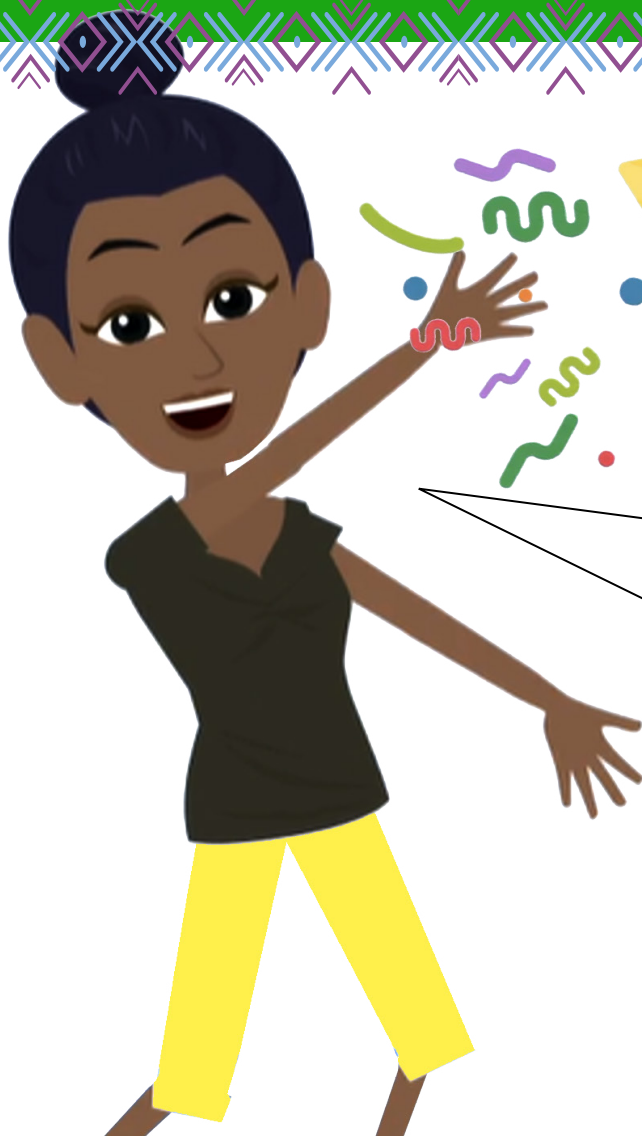
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🌐 Africaid Zvandiri 📱 @zvandiri 🌐 www.africaid-zvandiri.org





Being undetectable feels like happiness. When they told me and explained to me what being undetectable meant, my mind was dancing. I was very happy. It was a very difficult road for me but I have got here. Knowing that I have managed it, is so fulfilling.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- When you imagine your future, what does it look like?



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Africaid Zvandiri @zvandiri www.afraid-zvandiri.org





An undetectable viral load helps me embrace living positively and gives me hope to see a better future ahead of me. It gives me the courage to work towards achieving my dreams.

DISCUSSION QUESTION


- What does living positively mean to you?
- What are the dreams you will achieve?



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Even if you thought that HIV meant your life was over, it isn't. You are healthy. You can be happy. The future is yours!

An undetectable viral load indicates that the virus is under control. You are in charge of your body.

If HIV is suppressed, the virus is not damaging your health. You are not ill. You can be as healthy and strong as anyone.

Dream big. Pursue your future. If you're virally suppressed the virus will not interfere with your ability to achieve anything that you want.

Health Happiness and Hope

Becoming and staying virally suppressed is a journey. There may be bumpy times. Ask for help and with support you can get there. Keep going!

You are strong and beautiful on the inside and outside!

Becoming and staying virally suppressed is a journey. There may be bumpy times. Ask for help and with support you can get there. Keep going!

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WHAT IS VIRAL LOAD?

Your viral load tells you **how much HIV is in your body**. It is measured by taking a sample of blood which is then tested in a laboratory using a **viral load** test.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN HIV IS SUPRESSED?

If you take your antiretroviral medicines (ARVs) as prescribed, they can **control your HIV** and **reduce the amount of HIV** in your body (viral load) to a very low level. This allows your immune system to keep working and prevents illnesses due to HIV. This is called **viral suppression** or **being suppressed**. Viral suppression normally means you have fewer than 1000copies/ml of HIV in your blood

WHAT DOES UNDETECTABLE VIRAL LOAD MEAN?

An undetectable viral load means that the amount of HIV in the blood is so low that it cannot be detected when the blood is tested in the laboratory. HIV is still in your body but at such low levels that it cannot be detected. If you are living with HIV, having an undetectable viral load is the best thing you can do to stay healthy because it means your immune system can stay strong and can prevent illness. With the virus at such low levels it makes it harder for resistance to ART to develop, so your ARVs can go on and on working.

Having an undetectable viral load also helps stop HIV transmission to others through sex or from mothers during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding. It also prevents transmission through syringe sharing. We say this means that the virus is untransmittable.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO DO VIRAL LOAD REGULARLY?

Viral load can change over time for various reasons, but particularly if you don't take your ARVs regularly as prescribed. It is important to keep checking your viral load regularly so that you have up to date information about your viral load. This will tell you how well your medicines are working and whether you need to change anything about the way you take your medication. Knowing your viral load also helps you to know and understand the risk of passing HIV to others through sex, syringe sharing, pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

Viral Load

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DO YOU KNOW HOW OFTEN YOU SHOULD DO YOUR VIRAL LOAD?

The frequency of your viral load tests depends on how long you have been taking ARVs and your last viral load result. If you have just started ARVs, the viral load test should be repeated after 6 months. If your viral load is undetectable, it will then be repeated after 12 months. If your viral load is detectable, you will be supported for 3 months to take your medicines every day as prescribed then your viral load test will be repeated. If it is still detectable, the clinic may consider changing your ARV medicines.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HAVE AN UNDETECTABLE VIRAL LOAD?

- **Know about your health and body!** Make sure you understand HIV and how it can affect you if not managed well.
- **Know your treatment!** It is so important you understand your medicines, when they need to be taken and that if you adhere well to your medicines, you can take control of your health and life.
- **Decide why an undetectable viral load is important for you!** Set goals to motivate you and remind you why this is important to you.
- **Meet others!** Find someone who you know and trust to support you on this journey. Join a support group where you can share your thoughts and experiences with other people who understand. Link up with a Community Adolescent Treatment Supporter (CATS) or other peer supporter. By connecting with others, they can also help you think of practical ways to help you remember your medicines or to remind you of your goals.
- **Ask questions!** It is so important you have all the information you need so that you can make decisions about your body, your health, your life. Ask your health care worker, trusted friends and relatives, CATS and other peer supporters.

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