

DR WATITI

Is it safe to take ARVs after food?

Q Dear Doctor,
I am HIV-positive and was recently started on ARVs, which I take as one tablet before I go to sleep as I advised by my doctor. The only problem is that he also advised me not to take the drugs soon after eating, especially a fatty meal. I find this confusing because I would like to take my drugs after the evening meal, then go to sleep. What is the danger of taking my ARVs soon after a meal?

Richard

A Dear Richard,
Quite often, the absorption

of drugs, ARVs inclusive, is affected by the conditions in your stomach, which of course, are determined by whether it is empty or full plus the kind of food or drink you have taken. So, not all people living with HIV, who are on ARVs, are given the same instructions. You, however, received instructions of taking your ARVs when your stomach is empty, which means taking them one hour before taking a meal or waiting for two hours after you have eaten. This is because you are on a regimen that contains a drug known as Efavirenz.

Efavirenz is combined with tenofovir and lamivudine to form a fixed dose combination that

you take as one tablet once at night. The reason behind taking efavirenz on an empty stomach is that it is absorbed faster if taken when your stomach is full. This means you will experience more side-effects than if it is taken on an empty stomach and absorbed more slowly.

However, this is not the case with other ARVs such as dolutegravir that is going to replace efavirenz when rolled out next year. Because it has fewer side-effects and no food restrictions. So for now, follow your doctor's instructions to avoid increased side effects of efavirenz until next year when, hopefully, it will be replaced by dolutegravir.