

# Taking Care of Yourself

# 30

## NICE THINGS TO DO THAT COST (nearly) NOTHING

by Rebecca Denison

- 1 Breathe.** When you get overwhelmed or anxious, stop and take three long, deep breaths. Notice how it can calm you.
- 2 Refuse to be a victim.** Focus on what you *can* do, not on what you can't. Focus on *living* with HIV, not *dying* of AIDS. Say "I *have* HIV," not "I *am* HIV". Seek support, not pity.
- 3 Listen to your mother.** Get plenty of sleep. (Try music or a meditation tape if you can't sleep.) Eat nutritious food. Take a daily multivitamin. Get fresh air.
- 4 Call a toll-free hotline.**  
To talk with another woman with HIV:  
I in Ontario: Voices of Positive Women **1.800.263.0961**  
I in Quebec: CRISS (Centre de Ressources et d'Interventions en Santé et Sexualité) **1.866.240.0090**  
I in New Brunswick: AIDS New Brunswick **1.800.561.4009**  
I in BC: Positive Women's Network **1.866.692.3001**  
For HIV info:  
I Call your provincial or territorial HIV/AIDS hotline. Go to [www.cdnaids.ca](http://www.cdnaids.ca) and click on "contacts and links" to find the 1.800 number for you.  
I Call Health Canada's Division of HIV/AIDS at **613.952.5258** (not toll-free). Or go to Health Canada's Bureau of HIV/AIDS, STD and TB website at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/hast-vsmt/index.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/hast-vsmt/index.html)  
For treatment info: call CATIE **1.800.263.1638** or go to [www.catie.ca](http://www.catie.ca)
- 5 Educate yourself about HIV.** Subscribe to a newsletter (most are discreet and free for people who can't afford to pay). Go to an educational forum. Talk with a treatment advocate. Use the Internet. Go to the library. Avoid outdated information; treatment info changes quickly.

- 6 Exercise.** It's good for your body and helps release stress. Don't worry about picking the "right" activity; do something you love so you're more likely to do it. Find an exercise buddy. Go for a walk. Ask around about yoga or Tai Chi classes.
- 7 Express yourself; ask for support.** Talk with your friend. Hug your mom. Cuddle your kids. Cry with your sister. Share your feelings with your partner. Professional counsellors, therapists and clergy can also offer support.
- 8 Embrace your own spirituality.** Spirituality means different things to different people. Some find inspiration in nature, others in meditation or chanting, and others in their synagogue or church. Many faith organizations now have AIDS ministries to support HIV+ people and their loved ones. If you feel angry at God, acknowledge it. HIV is a virus, not a punishment. You don't have to spend time with people who judge you or your disease.
- 9 Ask for copies of your labs.** Learn what they mean.
- 10 Think and act positively.** Seek out people who are honest, trustworthy and supportive. Give yourself permission to temporarily or permanently distance yourself from people who are abusive or who make you feel badly about yourself. Write what you would want your obituary to say; then take steps to become that person.

- 11 Cry when you need to.** Let it out. Think of it as allowing negative emotions to flow out of you to make room for positive feelings to come in. Let someone hug you as you cry; they can't get HIV from your tears.
- 12 Find safe outlets for your anger.** Talk it out or give yourself a "time out." Write letters you may or may not send. Vent with a trusted friend.
- 13 Have fun!** Laugh at least once a day.
- 14 Forgive yourself and others.** Try not to waste precious energy being angry, bitter, jealous or resentful. Forgive yourself for past mistakes. Don't blame yourself for having HIV. Most adults have put themselves at risk; some of us got infected, the others were lucky.
- 15 Accept responsibility.** Pledge that HIV stops with you. Use condoms. Don't share needles.
- 16 Talk to other HIV+ people.** It can be a relief to talk to people who know what you're going through. They can share how they disclosed, made treatment decisions or dealt with safer sex. Find them at AIDS organizations, support groups, retreats, educational forums, conferences or hotlines.
- 17 Explore complementary therapies.** Vitamins, herbs and acupuncture are rarely free, but many people find them helpful to manage symptoms or side effects of medications. Talk with your doctor because some, like St. John's wort, can have interactions with HIV medications.
- 18 Explore art for fun or therapy.** Play with clay, colour with your kids. Learn something new about yourself.
- 19 Reduce use of drugs and alcohol.** If you or a loved one are using drugs or alcohol but want to stop, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) can help. If you inject drugs and can't or don't want to stop, ask if your community has a needle exchange.
- 20 Pamper yourself.** Take a hot bath, with candles, scents and nice music. Do your nails. Wear something comfortable. Invite a friend over for a video and popcorn.

- 21 Eat safely.** Avoid raw or undercooked meats/fish/eggs. Don't leave food out that should be refrigerated. Use separate cutting boards for raw meats and veggies. Don't take chances with spoiled food. "If in doubt, throw it out."
- 22 Journal writing.** Write about how you're feeling or what you're learning. Don't worry about grammar or spelling. It's just for you.
- 23 Appreciate nature.** Stop and smell the roses. Enjoy a sunset.
- 24 Pray, meditate or visualize.** Spend time in quiet contemplation or buy/borrow a meditation tape. Fill your mind with healing images and messages.
- 25 Enjoy the company of a pet.** Pets are great companions and, except for parrots, they don't talk back. To change kitty litter, you may want to wear a mask and gloves, or ask for help.
- 26 Massage, accupressure.** Non-sexual touch can help you get more comfortable with your body. Trade massages with a friend. Some organizations offer free massage.
- 27 Check out an AIDS organization.** Ask for what you need. Find out what they offer... a retreat, education, childcare, benefits counselling, or an art class.
- 28 Take life one day at a time.** Break big tasks into smaller, manageable ones. If necessary, take life one hour at a time. Tell yourself, "I don't have to know how I'll make it through the week. I just need to gather the strength to make my first appointment with the doctor."
- 29 Get involved.** Join a speakers bureau to educate kids about AIDS. Volunteer at an AIDS organization. Become an activist. Call your legislator. Stuff envelopes. Make phone calls. Don't worry that you don't know the lingo or that you're new. Everyone has something to contribute to the fight against AIDS.
- 30 Remember that ... you are not alone!!** 

Rebecca Denison is the founder of *WORLD* (Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Disease, [www.womenhiv.org](http://www.womenhiv.org)) and the editor of the *WORLD* newsletter. She's been living with HIV for 20 years and is the proud mom of 7-year-old twin girls.

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