

BOOKLET 1 OF 3

ATTAINING HIV HEALTH & WELLNESS:

# After you've tested positive

- get informed
- ask questions
- live well



  
PROJECT  
INFORM

JULY 2011

## **ATTAINING HIV HEALTH & WELLNESS**

Project Inform created this series of three publications to address commonly asked questions and issues that people face as they come to terms with their HIV status and begin addressing their health care needs.

### ***After you've tested positive***

Booklet 1 helps guide individuals on basic things to do after an HIV diagnosis, with an emphasis on understanding HIV infection, getting into care, and finding a support network.

### ***Considering treatment & your health care***

Booklet 2 explores making decisions, from considering treatment to talking things out with a support network and doctors to thinking broadly about personal health needs.

### ***What you should know about when to start & what to use***

Booklet 3 focuses on issues related to taking HIV medications, including when to start and what to use, planning ahead and finding an HIV-experienced doctor. (Some sections contain scientific concepts and information.)



*Project Inform acknowledges Liz Highleyman  
for her review and edit of these materials.*

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# Using this booklet ...

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The main focus of this booklet is to let you know that you can live well with HIV. It may take some time for that message to sink in, because adjusting to this new life may be an emotional road on top of it being a physical one. But this information has been written to answer questions that many people have after testing positive. You're not alone, and with resources and effort you can live a healthful life with HIV.

In these pages, you'll find topics that will help you understand more about your diagnosis. We highlight three key areas: *knowledge* (what's useful to know), *health* (what may be helpful to do), and *self-advocacy* (how to get what you need). When these three areas work well together, you get better outcomes. Getting informed about HIV, being actively involved in your health, and talking things out with your clinician and support network can result in a longer, healthier life.

You don't have to figure all of this out at once. Read this booklet at your own pace and revisit it from time to time as you feel ready for more. If you have any questions, call Project Inform's *HIV Health InfoLine*. We offer this information to help support, but not replace, the relationship with your health provider(s).

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

**HIV Health InfoLine** 1-866-HIV-INFO, 10a–4pm, M–F, PST

**Attaining HIV Health & Wellness** [www.projectinform.org/HIVhealth/](http://www.projectinform.org/HIVhealth/)

**Just Diagnosed Resource Center** [www.thebody.com/content/art49985.html](http://www.thebody.com/content/art49985.html)

# How is today different from earlier in the epidemic?

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Living with HIV today is very different from what it was like in the 80s or 90s. You may have some real fears such as being open about your HIV status, starting medicines or the prospect of living with HIV. These fears are normal, but some of them may be influenced by outdated information or by stories of what it was like living with HIV in the early years.

Early in the epidemic, many people developed advanced disease well before they even knew they had HIV. They often found themselves going to an emergency room to be treated for illnesses like pneumonia. This is not the case for most people today.

HIV is now sometimes considered a chronic disease, like diabetes or heart disease. This means it's something to be aware of and treat every day of your life, once you start taking meds. You will need to see a health provider about every 3 to 6 months.

However, some aspects of HIV could make it more troublesome, such as not being able to be open about it to friends or family. Stigma, discrimination and even domestic violence are real concerns for many people. These social aspects can sometimes make it difficult for individuals to take care of themselves.

HIV is certainly not a walk in the park, but many more support systems exist today and much more is known about how to treat it. HIV meds have dramatically improved and extended the lives of people living with the virus, and today's drugs are generally safer, better tolerated and easier to take. Plus, there are other steps you can take to prolong your life, improve your health, and help prevent other conditions.

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Today, people can live well with HIV. There are many support services available to you.
- Because you know your HIV status, you probably have time to deal with the news, find health care and make decisions that are best suited to you.

# What should you do now?

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You've already done a lot by learning your status and beginning to adjust to living healthfully with HIV. Your diagnosis can be a wake-up call to be more proactive about your health, develop a healthier lifestyle, and take advantage of treatment options.

You likely have some time to consider the many aspects to this new development in your life. These include lining up various types of support, finding a doctor experienced in treating HIV, making decisions about treatment, and getting linked into local resources to help you maximize your well-being. Finding others who live with HIV, as well as case managers or social workers, can go a long way to support you in living well.

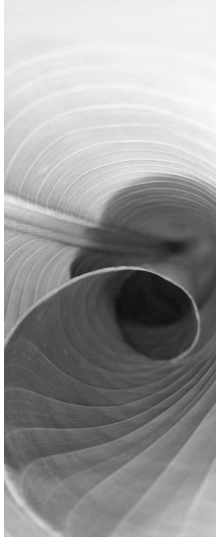
Chances are that you're already on your way. Hopefully you've contacted a local organization or talked with the person who gave this booklet to you. If you haven't, we suggest you find local resources and people who can give you referrals to services that suit you best. Project Inform can also help at 1-866-448-4636.

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Take some time to get adjusted to the news. You likely have time to plan out next steps like finding an experienced doctor.
- Many people seek help during this time, such as talking to a case manager or finding support groups or others living with HIV.







## **KNOWLEDGE:**

Getting informed  
about HIV

# What is HIV disease?

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Simply put, HIV disease is a disease of the immune system, although it can affect other parts of the body like the brain or kidneys. HIV (*human immunodeficiency virus*) causes disease because it gets into immune cells — especially CD4 cells — and uses them to reproduce. CD4 cells oversee the immune response, so as HIV infects and kills more of these cells, your body loses its ability to fight off illnesses called *opportunistic infections*, or OIs.

This gradual damage doesn't happen the same way or even at the same pace in everyone. In some people HIV weakens the immune system rapidly, in just a few years, while in others this doesn't happen at all. Without HIV treatment, it takes about 8–10 years before most people would face their first serious symptoms.

However, it's important to start treatment before these symptoms appear. With treatment, studies suggest that many people can live 40 years or more with HIV. Almost everyone will need to start treatment. A full consultation with a doctor can help you decide the best health care for you.

Even though you probably feel well, HIV is still considered a disease. The word *disease* may make it seem like you should feel sick, when in fact you can feel quite well a lot of the time. For this reason, some people don't think of it as a disease; instead they say they *live with HIV* or are *HIV-positive*.

However, the term *AIDS* is different. It's the latter stage of HIV disease, when an HIV-positive person has lost a lot of CD4s or developed certain OIs or cancers. *AIDS-defining conditions* include a CD4 count below 200, a CD4 percentage below 14%, and about two dozen AIDS-defining OIs. (See page 12 for more on CD4s.)

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- HIV infects immune cells, which makes the body lose its ability to fight off illnesses over time.
- Immune system damage doesn't happen the same way in everyone.
- Most people will have to start HIV treatment to stop further damage.
- *AIDS* may be diagnosed when the immune system is severely damaged.

# Your immune system

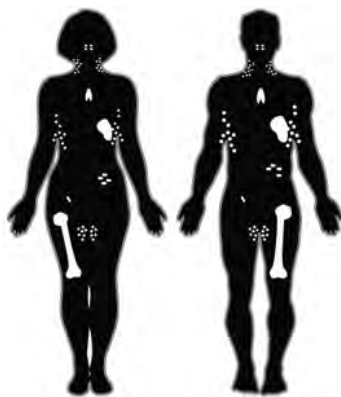
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The immune system is made of many parts: cells, tissues, organs, fluids and vessels. Some of these include the skin, appendix, tonsils, spleen, thymus and lymph glands. Scientists know a lot about how the immune system works, but there's a great deal more to learn.

The immune system is always on alert to find *microorganisms* like viruses or bacteria. These are also called *pathogens*, which means they can cause disease. When one is found, the immune system goes into action to destroy and get rid of it so it can't cause disease, which it does in many complex ways. As a result, you can feel various symptoms like headache, fever or aches and pains. This is why, during early HIV infection, many people feel like they have the flu.

Although the immune system can control HIV to some degree in most people over time, the virus can still push it out of balance, cause inflammation and destroy immune cells (mainly CD4s) that may not be easily replaced. Researchers are looking at ways to replenish these lost immune cells.

One way to help maintain a healthy immune system is to get into care as soon as possible to keep track of your health. Others include adopting habits that promote health like proper diet and exercise, preventing infections and starting HIV treatment when it's right for you. Using HIV medicines is the only way we know to control the virus over time, and treatment has improved and extended the lives of people living with HIV.



## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- The immune system is complex and made of many parts.
- HIV can push the immune system out of balance and destroy immune cells that are not easily replaced.
- We know how to control the virus over time with HIV treatment.

# Do you have to start meds right away?

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The answer depends on your situation. Many newly diagnosed people do not have to start treatment right away. You likely have time to get used to your diagnosis, learn about HIV and get your “ducks in a row.” This includes fully understanding the benefits and risks of treatment and figuring out how and where to get your medications. However, some people should start HIV treatment right away.



As new information becomes available, a panel of experts revises treatment Guidelines to help you make decisions about when to start HIV meds. (See page 11.) If blood tests show that your immune system is not controlling HIV or you have lost too many CD4s or you have other illnesses that make you less healthy, you may need to start. Pregnant HIV-positive women are also advised to start to protect them and their babies. Other people will start right away because they believe starting sooner will be better for them in the long run. This is something to discuss in more depth with your doctor or other people you trust. Some experts think that starting as soon as possible may help prevent immune system damage and other detrimental effects of HIV, while others feel it's better to wait due to possible long-term side effects.

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Many people don't have to start meds right away because they remain healthy in spite of HIV infection. For others, starting is important because their immune systems aren't controlling HIV, which can cause unwanted damage.
- Consult experienced doctors to help you decide what's best for you.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

Attaining HIV Health & Wellness [www.projectinform.org/HIVhealth/](http://www.projectinform.org/HIVhealth/)  
When to Start Treatment [www.projectinform.org/publications/when/](http://www.projectinform.org/publications/when/)

# HIV treatment guidelines

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The US Guidelines for treating HIV infection in adults were last updated January 2011. Updates are based on the latest understanding of current HIV research as interpreted by a panel of more than 30 HIV-experienced doctors, researchers and community representatives. The panel considers a broad range of study results and makes recommendations based on these data and their expert opinions.



The panel recommends that everyone who has a CD4 count below 500 should start treatment. Others should start HIV treatment regardless of their CD4 count: pregnant women, people with an AIDS-defining illness, people with HIV-related kidney disease, and people with hepatitis B who need to be treated for it.

These Guidelines are recommendations — not strict rules — but they're an important source of information. You and your doctor will likely use the Guidelines to make treatment decisions, while also considering your unique health needs, lifestyle and ability to start and stay on a regimen.

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- The Guidelines can help you and your doctor make treatment decisions.
- The Guidelines are not rules. They help guide decisions while you consider other aspects of your health and ability to start HIV meds.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

**US Guidelines for Treating HIV Infection in Adults**

[www.aidsinfo.nih.gov/guidelines](http://www.aidsinfo.nih.gov/guidelines)

**What you should know about when to start and what meds to use**

[www.projectinform.org/HIVhealth/day3/](http://www.projectinform.org/HIVhealth/day3/)

# Two blood tests: CD4 count, viral load

Two blood tests are used to track the health of your immune system, which can inform decisions about starting or changing HIV treatment. The first, the CD4 count, shows how many of these important immune cells are found in a sample of blood, which represents the total amount in your body. CD4s can be thought of as the “directors” of the immune system, guiding the immune response by telling other cells what to do. The goal is to keep your CD4s as high as possible for as long as possible.



## CD4 RANGE WHAT IT GENERALLY MEANS

<b>Below 200</b>	Should be on treatment. Indicates an AIDS diagnosis.
<b>200–350</b>	Should be on treatment. Some disease symptoms likely.
<b>350–500</b>	Recommend treatment.* Symptoms less likely, but possible.
<b>Above 500</b>	“Normal” range. Could be on treatment.* Symptoms even less likely.

\* From *US Guidelines for the Use of Antiretroviral Agents in Adults and Adolescents*.

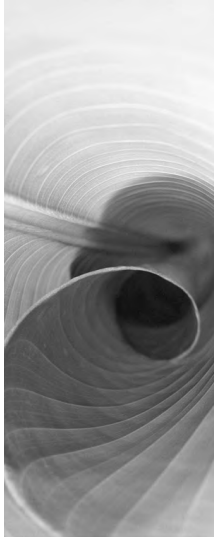
The other test, the viral load, shows the amount of HIV found in a sample of blood, which represents the total amount in your body. Another major goal of HIV treatment is to keep viral load as low as possible for as long as possible, ideally *undetectable* or below 50 copies. This means your immune system or HIV meds are keeping the virus under control. A low viral load is generally considered to be below 55,000, while a high viral load is generally considered to be above 100,000.

### MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- CD4 counts show the relative health of your immune system. Keep them as high as possible for as long as possible. Viral load tests show how active HIV is. Keep it as low as possible for as long as possible.

### HELPFUL RESOURCES

**Blood Work: Two Common Tests** [www.projectinform.org/publications/bw/](http://www.projectinform.org/publications/bw/)



## HEALTH:

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Getting involved  
in your health care

# Getting into care as soon as possible

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It's very important to see a doctor as soon as possible after your diagnosis. This does not necessarily mean you should start HIV treatment right away, but you and your doctor need to assess your health and begin to plan for the future. Getting into care can improve your quality of life even before you start treatment.

Some issues in your life may make it hard for you to see a doctor regularly, such as drug and/or alcohol use, unstable housing or lack of insurance and other resources. These issues can be addressed as you establish your HIV care, and many resources are available to help. Your doctor may be able to help you or refer you to a case manager or social worker. (See pages 24–25.)

Many people develop a more assertive attitude about their well-being when they find out they have HIV. Because treating HIV disease can be complicated, making decisions about when, how and whether to start treatment isn't always easy. One positive step is to actively participate in your health care and in making treatment decisions. This means that both you and your health provider(s) learn how to work together and communicate thoughtfully with one another.

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Find a doctor soon to assess your current health needs.
- Many support services can help with issues such as housing, lack of insurance or domestic violence.
- Participating in your health care decisions can help you make the most out of living well with HIV.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

**AAHIVM Directory** [www.aahivm.org](http://www.aahivm.org) (click **MEMBERS** at top)

**GLMA Directory** [www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org) (click **RESOURCES >> FOR PATIENT** at top)

**HIVMA Directory** [www.hivma.org](http://www.hivma.org) (click **DIRECTORIES** at top)

# Developing relationships with your doctor(s)

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Many people simply do what they're told when it comes to health. So participating with your doctor — on all aspects of health — may be a new experience. It may be uncomfortable at first, and some doctors are unfamiliar with patients asking questions and may need practice with this type of relationship as well.



However, people who take a more active role and participate in making their own health care decisions tend to have better overall health. You may also find that developing a closer relationship with other staff in your doctor's office, like a nurse practitioner (NP) or physician's assistant (PA), can be helpful as they may have more time to spend with you during an appointment. Other medical professionals can also be resources, such as a pharmacist you trust. You may also be able to get second opinions from other doctors your friends or family see.

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Developing a partnership with your doctor may take some time and practice.
- Participating in decisions around your HIV care can lead you to have better overall health.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

### Building a Cooperative Patient/Doctor Relationship

[www.projectinform.org/publications/patient/](http://www.projectinform.org/publications/patient/)

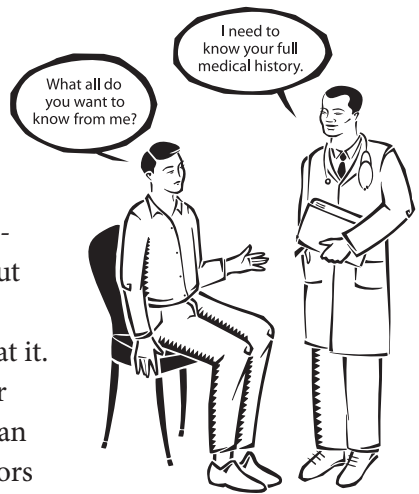
## Your first few doctor visits

The first few visits after your diagnosis are important for you and your doctor. They are the foundation for what you learn about HIV and how you and your doctor work together to treat it.

Your first visit to a doctor after your diagnosis can be an emotional time. Many doctors are sensitive and caring, and respond well to your needs. However, they have time constraints and are there to provide medical care, not necessarily emotional support. Friends, family, support groups, social workers and therapists can help with emotional support.

If possible, you may want to interview doctors before you make a final decision on who you want to see. You have the right to make sure you're comfortable with your health provider and to seek other help if the relationship isn't working for you, though this is not always possible.

It's important to get a full exam and medical history. Be open and honest about what you know about your health. Some conditions such as diabetes and hepatitis C can complicate treating HIV, so knowing about them early and talking about them helps to ensure continued health.



Writing questions down before your appointments can help you make the most of your visits. Consider finding a friend or an advocate to go with you to make sure your questions get answered. If you start seeing a new doctor, make sure you have your medical records transferred.

Below is a list of common tests your doctor may run to assess your health. It's a good idea to check in with him/her to make sure the right tests and screenings are done to give you the most accurate information possible.

- Complete medical history, if this is a new doctor
- Full physical exam
- Blood pressure
- Body temperature
- Two CD4 cell counts and viral load tests, taken about 2 weeks apart
- Resistance test, if viral load is above 1,000
- Complete blood count
- Cholesterol measurements
- Blood sugar
- Pregnancy test
- Full GYN exam, with Pap smear, perhaps HPV test
- Anal Pap smear, if at risk for anal cancer
- Hepatitis B and C antibody tests
- Sexually transmitted infection screening and history
- Consider various vaccines, such as flu, hepatitis B or pneumococcal pneumonia
- Oral exam by a dentist



# Consider your general health

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Many people find that in attending to HIV they also confront many other aspects of their lives. The most notable one is overall health, as good health can contribute greatly to positive outcomes when treating HIV. This includes addressing mind, body, spirit and social connections.

Every day, people make choices about their health through both action and inaction. Taking the time to identify and explore ways to improve your health will contribute to a strong foundation. Some of these issues are found on page 19.

For example, stopping smoking can greatly reduce health risks within the first year or two of quitting. Certain foods (especially those high in sugar and saturated fats) can contribute to conditions like diabetes and heart disease. Stress causes chemicals to release in the body that affect the immune system. Engaging in safer sex prevents you from getting other sexual infections, and helps prevent transmission of HIV to your partner(s).

Depression is common among people with HIV. Recognizing and properly treating it can help you make better health decisions. Alcohol and drugs can harm the liver and other organs, and make it harder to take your HIV meds regularly. Studies show that certain techniques such as stress reduction can improve health.

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Take time to identify and explore ways to improve your health.
- Consider some of the suggestions on page 19, or come up with your own.

### HELPFUL RESOURCES

**Maintain Your General Health** [www.projectinform.org/publications/health/](http://www.projectinform.org/publications/health/)  
**Nutrition & Diet Tips** [www.aidsmeds.com/articles/Nutrition\\_7670.shtml](http://www.aidsmeds.com/articles/Nutrition_7670.shtml)

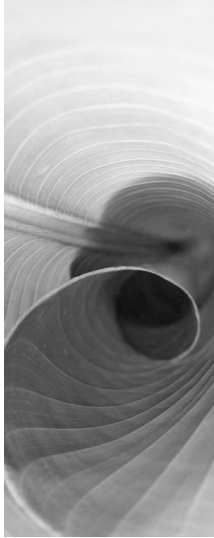
# Ways to improve your health

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This list is offered as a way to help you think about ways to improve your general health.

- Understand that HIV treatment can be successful: newer drugs are generally less toxic and easier to take and tolerate.
- Find HIV-experienced doctors, like dentists, OB-GYNs, etc.
- Keep up with doctor appointments.
- Get recommended vaccinations, including annual flu shots.
- Be alert to symptoms and report them to your doctor.
- Screen and treat OIs and other conditions appropriately.
- Get other conditions under control through proper treatment, including diabetes, hepatitis, high blood pressure, etc.
- Consider disclosing your HIV status to those you trust.
- Find a social network that suits you. Share ideas with others.
- Improve your diet. Consider consulting a nutritionist or dietician.
- Take daily walks.
- Exercise in ways that work for you.
- Find ways to reduce stress as much as you can.
- Get enough good sleep every night.
- Stop smoking.
- Take steps to reduce or stop drinking alcohol.
- Take steps to reduce or stop using street drugs.
- Get into a harm reduction or recovery program if needed.
- Ask questions of people you trust when you don't understand something.
- Ask for help — there are many resources available.





## **SELF-ADVOCACY:**

Learning to  
support yourself

# How do you get into health care?

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Some people have few problems getting their health care costs covered by private insurance, which is generally funded by your current or former employer. However, many other people living with HIV rely on public health care programs or coverage funded by federal and state governments. These include Medicaid, Medicare, the Ryan White program and AIDS Drug Assistance Programs (ADAPs). Some of these are guaranteed for all who qualify while others have limited funding and may or may not be available in your area.



It is likely you can find some type of health care that you can afford or that's free of charge. The difficult part can be locating resources and piecing together affordable care by combining several services. A more thorough discussion can be found in Project Inform's publication, *HIV Health & Wellness: Considering treatment and your health care*.

A qualified benefits counselor can help you figure out a way through this maze, as can some case managers and social workers. Check with your local AIDS service organization, or Project Inform toll-free at 1-866-448-4636.

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Most HIV-positive people rely upon public programs for their health care, and usually you can find coverage.
- A benefits counselor, case manager or social worker can help find ways to cover your health care.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

**High Risk Pool Program** [www.projectinform.org/publications/riskpool/](http://www.projectinform.org/publications/riskpool/)

**Access Project** [www.atdn.org/access/](http://www.atdn.org/access/)

**Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services** [www.cms.gov](http://www.cms.gov)

# Telling others about your HIV status

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Telling others about your status can feel scary, but it may also help you cope. People who share this news may enjoy better health, probably due in part to relief of the stress of keeping their status a secret. Being open about your status with your medical providers can help ensure you get the most appropriate care.



You don't have to tell everyone — or even anyone — and you don't have to do it all at once. But finding people who can support you will go a long way to helping you stay healthy and improve your quality of life. Choose carefully who you want to tell and who you think will respond well to the news. Take your time when planning who to tell.

For some people, telling others can mean facing the risk of abandonment or even violence. If you fear telling those close to you, find a support group, a therapist or a domestic violence assistance group to work through those relationship issues before you make final decisions.

Think about what you would do if your disclosure doesn't go well. Some people, even some health providers, may not react well. It's best to be prepared for various reactions from those you tell and be ready to seek support if you need it.

## MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Telling others who can support you can keep you healthy.
- If you do disclose, plan ahead and decide who you want to tell.
- Consider ahead of time what to do if someone doesn't react well.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

**Telling Others about Your HIV** [www.projectinform.org/publications/disclose/](http://www.projectinform.org/publications/disclose/)  
**To Tell or Not to Tell** [www.aidsmeds.com/articles/Disclosure\\_7568.shtml](http://www.aidsmeds.com/articles/Disclosure_7568.shtml)

## Lining up support

Although many services exist for people with HIV — such as medical care, support groups, peer mentors, and referrals to housing



and other resources — it's up to you to engage with them and decide if they're right for you. You may have to keep working at it because the first contact may not be the right fit.

Many people seek peer and other types of support during the first few months or years after their diagnosis. This can be a helpful way to get used to the new “surroundings,” so to speak. Many people find this is a temporary but important way to seek help until they feel secure about what is needed. You may even find someone who becomes a friend or confidante because they've had similar experiences.

### **CASE MANAGER / SOCIAL WORKER / BENEFITS COUNSELOR**

Many community agencies have case managers or social workers who know their local social service system and can help you find resources. Talking to them regularly may solve some of the practical issues you face, like finding transportation, housing, a doctor and ways to cover your health care costs. Many organizations offer these services for free. Dial “211” for local service referrals, or call the HIV Health InfoLine for more information at 1-866-448-4636.

## SUPPORT GROUPS / FRIENDS

Support groups are one way to find a safe space to talk about your life. Studies show that people who participate in support groups enjoy better health and quality of life. It may take time to find one that suits you. Some people have even started their own groups. Check local community based organizations for referrals. You can also dial “211” to get local referrals, or call the HIV Health InfoLine at 1-866-448-4636.

## INTERNET CHAT ROOMS, BLOGS, AND “ASK THE EXPERTS”

Several HIV-related websites offer support anonymously. Thousands of people have used this type of support for on-going help or even a quick answer to a nagging question. But be aware that there’s a lot of misinformation on the Internet.

### HELPFUL RESOURCES

#### — RESOURCE FINDERS —

**National Prevention Information Network** [www.cdcnpin.org](http://www.cdcnpin.org)

**ASO Finder** [www.asofinder.com](http://www.asofinder.com)

**ASO Directory** <http://directory.poz.com>

**State AIDS Hotlines** [www.projectinform.org/hotline/state.shtml](http://www.projectinform.org/hotline/state.shtml)

#### — COMMUNITY SUPPORT RESOURCES —

**Ask the Experts** [www.thebody.com/content/art40482.html](http://www.thebody.com/content/art40482.html)

**AIDS Meds/Poz Community Forums** <http://forums.poz.com/>

**Strength In Numbers (HIV+ gay/bisexual men)** [www.sinhq.xbuild.com](http://www.sinhq.xbuild.com)

**Yahoo support groups for HIV+ people**  
<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/hivaidnetwork/>

**HIV+ Bulletin Boards**  
[www.thebody.com/cgi-bin/bbs/ubbthreads.php](http://www.thebody.com/cgi-bin/bbs/ubbthreads.php)

**The Well Project (for women)**  
[www.thewellproject.org/en\\_US/Getting\\_Connected/](http://www.thewellproject.org/en_US/Getting_Connected/)

# Laws regarding disclosure and discrimination

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Telling your co-workers or employers about your HIV status is a different type of disclosure and should be considered carefully before making decisions. Investigate your options with legal experts before disclosing your status at work.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers do not have the right to ask about a disability or your health before hiring you. People living with HIV/AIDS are protected under the ADA, which means your employer can't discriminate against you and must reasonably accommodate your physical needs at work. In order to get accommodations, you will need a letter from your doctor, but it can state that you have a *chronic condition* as opposed to having HIV or AIDS.

Some people who are concerned about testing for HIV fear that if they're HIV-positive they may experience discrimination. However, important federal and state laws prohibit both the disclosure of medical information and discrimination against HIV-positive people. The laws are not perfect and are interpreted differently in each state, so it's important to understand the limits of the laws in your area or jurisdiction.

Some states and foreign countries have laws that make it a crime to knowingly transmit HIV to someone else. While these laws are clearly meant for people who try to infect another person, they have been used to threaten or prosecute others. In fact, some laws state that transmission doesn't have to actually happen for possible prosecution. Though these cases are few, they're still a concern. It's important to know the laws where you live.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

Americans with Disabilities Act Q&A [www.ada.gov/pubs/hivqanda.txt](http://www.ada.gov/pubs/hivqanda.txt)

AIDS Legal Referral Panel [www.alrp.org](http://www.alrp.org)

## Important questions

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- Do you know of any support groups that might work for you?
- How can you get help paying for your health care and prescriptions?
- How's the relationship with your doctor? Do you work well together?
- Do you see an HIV-experienced doctor?
- What resources do you use to learn about HIV?
- Have you thought about taking HIV meds yet?
- What types of support have worked for you before?
- Is there anything to be concerned about now that you've gotten a full physical and test results?
- Do you know of a helpful case manager or benefits counselor?
- Are you worried about people finding out your status?
- Have you told anyone about your HIV status? How did that go?
- What things can you do to reduce stress?



## Checklist for getting started

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- I've found support people, such as a social worker or benefits counselor, who can help me find local services or care.
- I've found a doctor experienced in treating HIV.
- I know a doctor to go to for my first appointment.
- I've made my first appointment.
- I've found other providers, like a dentist or gynecologist, who understand how to treat people with HIV.
- I've written questions down for my first doctor visit.
- I've considered telling others about my status and have made a plan for how to do it.
- I've considered my emotional support needs and will seek help.
- I know how I'll pay for my HIV care, meds and tests.
- I've talked to my doctor about vaccines I may need.
- I've talked to my doctor about screenings I should get, such as hepatitis B and C, cervical and anal Pap smears.
- My first results are: \_\_\_\_ CD4s, \_\_\_\_ viral load.  
My second results are: \_\_\_\_ CD4s, \_\_\_\_ viral load.
- I know what these test results mean.
- I've talked to people I trust about how to treat HIV.
- I know what I need to do to get ready for making decisions about treatment.
- If I have questions and my doctor is not available, I can call \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

# Online resources that may help

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## RESOURCES FOR HIV CARE

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### Project Inform

1-866-448-4636 , and  
[www.projectinform.org](http://www.projectinform.org)

### Directories for ASOs

[www.aidshotline.org](http://www.aidshotline.org) (in CA)  
[www.asofinder.com](http://www.asofinder.com)  
[www.cdcnpin.org](http://www.cdcnpin.org)  
(click on HIV/AIDS at left)  
<http://directory.poz.com>

### Directories for HIV Providers

[www.aahivm.org](http://www.aahivm.org)  
(click on MEMBERS at top)  
[www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org)  
(click on RESOURCES >>  
FOR PATIENT at top)  
[www.healthHIV.org](http://www.healthHIV.org)  
[www.hivma.org](http://www.hivma.org)  
(click DIRECTORIES at top)

### State AIDS Hotlines

[www.projectinform.org/  
hotline/state.shtml](http://www.projectinform.org/hotline/state.shtml)

## INSURANCE PROGRAMS, HELP WITH HEALTH COSTS

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### Centers for Medicaid/Medicare

[www.cms.gov](http://www.cms.gov)

### HealthCare.gov

[www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov)

### Medicare

[www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

### The Access Project

[www.atdn.org/access/](http://www.atdn.org/access/)

### Welvista

[www.welvista.org](http://www.welvista.org)

## FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR

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### Asian/Pacific Islander Wellness

[www.apiwellness.org](http://www.apiwellness.org)

### Black AIDS Institute

[www.blackaids.org](http://www.blackaids.org)

### Latino Commission on AIDS

[www.latinoaids.org](http://www.latinoaids.org)

### Nat'l Minority AIDS Coalition

[www.nmac.org](http://www.nmac.org)

### Native Prevention Center

[www.nnaapc.org](http://www.nnaapc.org)

## FOR WOMEN

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### The Well Project

[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

### Three Poz Gals

[www.threepozgals.net](http://www.threepozgals.net)

## WORLD

[www.womenhiv.org](http://www.womenhiv.org)

### Women Alive

[www.women-alive.org](http://www.women-alive.org)

## CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

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### HIV+ Bulletin Boards

[www.thebody.com/cgi-bin/  
bbs/ubbthreads.php](http://www.thebody.com/cgi-bin/bbs/ubbthreads.php)

### National Association of PWAs

[www.napwa.org](http://www.napwa.org)

### Poz Community Forums

<http://forums.poz.com/>

### Strength In Numbers (gay/bi men)

[www.sinhq.xbuild.com](http://www.sinhq.xbuild.com)

### Yahoo Support Groups

[http://health.groups.yahoo.  
com/group/hivaidsnetwork/](http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/hivaidsnetwork/)









**"MY HEALTH GOT  
BETTER WHEN I TALKED  
ABOUT MY HIV."**

**CALL US. WE HAVE TIME TO TALK.**

## **HIV HEALTH INFOLINE**

Monday–Friday, 10am–4pm (Pacific Time), in English & Spanish

**1.866.HIV.INFO (448.4636) TOLL-FREE**

Our operators live with or are impacted by HIV, and provide valuable insight and support to callers by answering questions about HIV care and making referrals to local services.

[www.projectinform.org/HIVhealth/](http://www.projectinform.org/HIVhealth/)

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