

Health Information Sheet

Coping with HIV Infection

Finding out that you have HIV can be frightening. One way to fight your fear is to learn as much as you can about the disease. Knowing about HIV and AIDS will also help you take the best care of yourself.

You can fight your worry about HIV infection with reliable information. Although your friends and family may give you advice, the best information comes from your doctor or your counselor, or from one of the national, state or local community AIDS resources. Don't allow your feelings about your past behavior, your lifestyle or the possibility that you gave HIV to others keep you from seeking help and information.

What can I do to help myself?

The good news about HIV is that early treatment is helping many people with this infection live longer, healthier lives. It's normal to feel sadness, anxiety and fear when you first learn that you have tested positive for HIV. However, if you have trouble sleeping, eating or concentrating, or if you have thoughts of suicide, tell your doctor. Treatment can help with depression and anxiety.

- If you've been told you have HIV, give yourself permission to be afraid. It's OK. But don't let this fear keep you from doing all you can to help yourself. Here are some things you can do:
- Get medical check-ups at regular intervals even if you're feeling well. Ask your doctor how often to come in for a check-up.
- Always use a condom. Always practice "safer sex." If you don't know how, find out! Your doctor can give you information.
- Help your body fight infection by using less alcohol and tobacco--or give them up entirely. Eat a balanced diet. Get regular exercise. Get enough sleep.
- Find out what causes stress in your home life and your work life. Do whatever you can to reduce this stress.
- Don't share needles for drugs, steroids, piercing or tattooing.
- Get regular dental check-ups--bleeding gums can increase your risk of infecting someone else.
- Volunteer to work for an AIDS organization. Facing your fears directly can be a good way to cope with them.

Who should know I have HIV?

If you have tested positive for HIV, you must tell your past and present sexual partners. They should get tested too. You must also tell any future sexual partners that you have tested positive for HIV. If you are now in a relationship,

you may wish to ask your doctor about how to explain your positive test results to your partner.

Let your doctor and dentist know that you have HIV. This will help them give you the care you need. Your privacy will be respected, and your doctor and dentist can't refuse to treat you just because you have HIV.

What legal issues should I consider?

Everyone who tests positive for HIV should consider ahead of time which treatment options they would choose if they became seriously ill and were unable to tell others what they wanted. Advance directives are written guidelines that tell doctors your wishes for different kinds of treatment if a time comes when you can't make those decisions yourself.

You should also consider getting a medical power-of-attorney. This is a legal document that names someone (a life partner, a family member or a friend) to make decisions for you if you are seriously ill. A lawyer can draw up the documents for an advance directive and a medical power-of-attorney.

Where can I get more information about HIV and AIDS?

Many national, state and local resources are available to people who are well but worried about getting HIV, to people who are HIV positive, and to supportive partners, family members or friends. A call to one or more of the following telephone numbers will point you in the right direction:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National HIV-AIDS Clearinghouse:
1-800-342-2437

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National HIV/AIDS Hotline:
1-800-458-5231; 1-800-342-7432 (Spanish); 1-800-243-7889 (TDD)

National Indian AIDS Hotline:
1-800-283-2437

Teens Tap Hotline:
1-800-234-8336

Gay Men's Health Crisis Hotline:
1-212-807-6655; 1-212-645-7470 (TDD)

This information provides a general overview on coping with HIV and may not apply to everyone.