

Dear All

Much is needed to be done regarding educating people living with HIV as their knowledge is not updated to the required level. Experiences from around the world make it clear that no community or country can tackle the negative fall-out of HIV&AIDS without building on the strengths and the first hand knowledge of those living with the infection. In countries where PLHIV have taken the initiative to mount constructive responses, such as Brazil, Thailand and Uganda, there has been a slow-down in new infections and a more sensitive approach to care has emerged. Today we are sharing with you an article which highlights the steps to be taken after being infected from HIV.

Steps to be taken

Finding out that you have HIV can be scary and overwhelming. If you feel overwhelmed, try to remember that you can get help and that these feelings will get better with time.

There are some things that you should know about HIV that may ease some of the stress or confusion you are feeling.

Remember

You are not alone. Many people are living with HIV, even if you don't know that they are.

HIV does not equal death: Having HIV does not mean that you are going to die of it.

A diagnosis of HIV does not automatically mean that you have AIDS

Don't freeze: Learning how to live with HIV and getting in touch with a health care team that knows how to manage HIV will help you to feel better and get on with your life

Testing positive for HIV is a serious matter. This guide will take you through the steps you need to take to protect your health.

Understand your diagnosis

When your doctor tells you that you are HIV positive, it means that you have been infected with the virus. The HIV test does not tell you if you have AIDS or how long you have been infected or how sick you might be.

Soon after your diagnosis, your doctor will run other tests to determine your overall health condition, and the condition of your immune system. For descriptions of these tests, go to "Understanding Laboratory Tests."

Learn about HIV and AIDS

The more you know about HIV and how to treat it, the less confused and anxious you will be about your diagnosis. The more you learn, the better you will be at making decisions about your health

Find support

Finding support means finding people who are willing to help you through the emotional and physical issues you are going to face. If you let the right people in your life know that you are HIV positive, they can:

Offer you support and understanding provide you with assistance, such as running errands and helping with child care, doctor visits, and work; learn from you how HIV is spread and work with you to prevent the virus from spreading.

Telling others

Deciding to tell others that you are HIV positive is an important personal choice. It can make a big difference in how you cope with the disease. It can also affect your relationships with people.

If you decide to share information about your diagnosis, it is best to tell people you trust or people who are directly affected. These include:

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If you decide to share information about your diagnosis, it is best to tell people you trust or people who are directly affected. These include:

- Family members
- People you spend a lot of time with, such as good friends;
- All your health care providers, such as doctors, nurses, and dentists.
- You don't have to tell everyone about your HIV status right away. You might want to talk with a counselor or social worker first.

Join a support group

Joining a group of people who are facing the same challenges you are facing can have important benefits. These include feeling better about yourself, finding a new life focus, making new friendships, improving your mood, and better understanding your needs and those of your family. People in support groups often help each other deal with common experiences associated with being HIV positive.

Support groups are especially helpful if you live alone or don't have family and friends nearby.

There are different types of support groups, from hotlines to face-to-face encounter groups.

Work with your doctor

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. If left untreated, it can lead to illness and death. This is why it is so important to get medical care if you find out you have HIV. Do not be afraid to seek a doctor with experience in treating HIV-infected patients—he or she can help you to stay well.

Treatments for HIV are not perfect, but can be very effective for many people. A doctor or other health care provider can explain the best options for you.

If you work with your health care provider in planning your care, you can deal with the disease in a way that is best for you.

Before appointments

Start with a list or notebook. Prepare for your appointment with your doctor by writing down:

1. any questions that you have (print out questions to ask your doctor and take it to your appointment)
2. any symptoms or problems you want to tell the doctor about (include symptoms such as poor sleep, trouble concentrating, feeling tired)
3. a list of the medications that you are taking (include herbs and vitamins)
4. upcoming tests or new information you've heard about
5. changes in your living situation, such as a job change

That way you won't forget anything during the appointment.

You may want to ask a friend or family member to come with you and take notes. It can be difficult for you to take notes and pay attention to what your doctor is saying at the same time

Monitor your health

Once you have been diagnosed with HIV, you need to pay closer attention to your health than you did before.

You can keep track of your immune system in two ways. First, have regular lab tests done. Lab tests often can show signs of illness before you have any noticeable symptoms.

Second, listen to what your body is telling you, and be on the alert for signs that something isn't right. Note any change in your health—good or bad. And don't be afraid to call a doctor.

Protect others

Once you have HIV, you can give the virus to others by having unprotected sex or by sharing needles (or, if you have a child, by breast-feeding). This is true even if you are feeling perfectly fine. Using condoms and clean needles can prevent infecting other people. It can also protect you from getting other sexually transmitted diseases.

Sometimes it can be difficult to explain that you have HIV to people you have had sex with or shared needles with in the past. However, it is important that they know so that they can decide whether to get tested. If you need help telling

people that you may have exposed them to HIV, most city or county health departments will tell them for you, without using your name. Ask your doctor about this service

Know when to consider treatment

Whether or not to start treatment for HIV is a decision that each person must make with his or her doctor. While anti-HIV drugs (also known as antiretrovirals) can be lifesavers, there are good reasons to delay taking them right away.

In general, you and your doctor will need to consider

how well you feel

whether you can stick to a treatment plan

whether or not you have AIDS

Move forward with your life

Life does not end with a diagnosis of HIV. In fact, with proper treatment, people with HIV can live fairly healthy lives. Taking care of your overall health can help you deal with HIV:

Get regular medical and dental checkups

Eat a healthy diet

Exercise regularly

Avoid smoking and recreational drug use

Practice safer sex (it can protect others from getting HIV, and can protect you from other sexually transmitted diseases)

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