

RESPECT

Love. Life. Others.



3 STEPS TO LIVING WITH HIV

1 CHANGE your lifestyle

- ✓ Eat a varied and healthy diet that includes fruit, vegetables, rice and bread, nuts, beans, chicken and fish.
- ✓ Reduce or avoid junk food, which has lots of sugar, salt and fat and have no nutritional value.
- ✓ Go for regular medical check-ups. You should visit the clinic for a check-up every 3-4 months. A person living with HIV can get sick very easily but most of the illnesses can be cured if treated early.
- ✓ Exercise regularly to stay strong and fit
- ✓ If you smoke – STOP
- ✓ If you drink alcohol – STOP
- ✓ Get enough sleep and rest
- ✓ Have a positive attitude
- ✓ Living with HIV and AIDS can be very stressful - take time to relax and find a way to reduce stress through counseling, meditation exercise and rest.
- ✓ Practice safe sex - even if both you and your partner are both HIV+, there is a risk that you will re-infect each other. Always use a condom.
- ✓ Talk to someone you trust or join a support group. (You can get further information from your nearest VCT centre).
- ✓ Keep your home, especially your cooking area clean and free from germs.
- ✓ Drink plenty of fluids, such as clean water.

2 Ask: Knowledge is power

I keep hearing about positive living - what is it exactly?

Positive living means having a healthy and safe lifestyle coupled with a positive attitude to your HIV status. It means taking charge of your life, managing your health and life constructively and believing in your future.

What does it mean to disclose my HIV status?

Disclosure happens when you tell someone that you are infected with HIV. Disclosure is a process and not a once-off event. It can take some time before you are ready to tell others that you are HIV positive.

There are 2 phases of disclosure:

- 1) Personal disclosure is disclosing to your partner, your children, other family and close friends.
- 2) Public disclosure is disclosing to your community, work and media, e.g. newspaper, radio and TV.

No one has the right to disclose your status, without your consent.

I am HIV positive, what medical tests are there to monitor my health?

There are 2 main medical tests that a health professional may suggest. You have the right to ask what the tests are for and what the results mean. Both of these tests involve taking a sample of your blood.

1) CD4 tests

CD4 cells (also known as T Helper cells) are the cells that help your body fight infections - your immune system. A CD4 test measures how strong your immune system is and how much damage HIV has done to your immune system. As HIV progresses the CD4 count will become lower.

2) Viral load test

The viral load tells you how active the HIV is in your body and how fast the virus is reproducing itself. The higher your viral load, the higher the level of HIV in your body.

I work away from home. How do I find out about local support groups?

Visit your nearest VCT centre. They can give you details of local support groups, clinics and other organizations that may be able to help.

Why do I have to wear a condom if both my partner and I are HIV positive?

HIV is a very clever virus that keeps changing. The HIV you have may not be the same type of HIV your partner has. If you have sex without a condom you may re-infect your partner with a different type of HIV. Re-infection means getting infected again with HIV and can make the HIV more severe. Condoms can also protect you from getting other Sexually Transmitted Infections and prevent pregnancies.

3 Use: there is help available

What is ARV?

Anti Retro Viral Therapy is a combination of medicines that can stop HIV from multiplying in your body and stop your immune system from getting weaker. It does not cure AIDS or HIV but it does help people with AIDS to live longer and to improve their quality of life. Each person reacts differently to different drugs, and you and your doctor will have to decide which drugs to use and when to start using them. If you want to find out more about ARV, visit your nearest VCT or talk to your doctor.