Did You Just Test HIV-Positive? [1]

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Para leer este hoja informativa en español, presione aquí [2].

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Getting an HIV diagnosis can be life-changing news. As with other chronic health conditions, people may have many different feelings when they learn they are living with HIV. You may be angry or confused, or other uncomfortable emotions. You may also wonder what you should do next and how this diagnosis will affect your plans for your future.

It may not change how you feel right now, but it is important to mention that people living with HIV can live just as long as anyone else in places where HIV drugs are widely available. Many years of research have shown that, if they are taking HIV drugs that keep the amount of virus in their body very low (or undetectable), a person living with HIV cannot pass on the virus [3] to a sexual partner who is HIV-negative [4]. It is also possible to get pregnant [5] and give birth to a child who does not have HIV [6]. Breastfeeding your infant [7] may be a possibility, as well.
Normal Feelings

The first step is to accept that your feelings are a normal response to your diagnosis. Ignoring feelings such as fear or shock does not make them go away, and may even make them last longer. Feelings are like waves that rise and fall. Try to allow yourself to feel what you are feeling and let the feelings pass through you. It is okay to cry if you feel like it.

There are people that still believe testing positive for HIV is a death sentence. This is definitely not true. HIV is a chronic health condition that can be kept under control with medications and care. Many people living with HIV lead full and healthy lives, as many people with other chronic health conditions do.

You may find yourself asking, "How could I have let this happen to me?" regarding getting HIV. Try to be gentle with yourself. You have just gotten some hard news, and may face changes and challenges ahead. If being compassionate with yourself seems difficult, try to imagine how you would respond to a loved one if you just learned that they were living with HIV. Think about the love and comfort you might give that person, and share some of this with yourself. You are just as deserving, and just as capable, of giving and receiving love as ever.

Get Help and Support

Being diagnosed with HIV presents many challenges. Building a support network [8] can help you learn how to cope. Take your time and do not feel that you must tell everyone right away. Do not let the fear of being judged keep you from talking to people. If it is hard to tell family and friends at first, you may want to turn to HIV organizations. For more information, see our fact sheets on Disclosure [9] and Getting Connected [8].

Some newly diagnosed people may want to speak with other people living with HIV. This can help them get out of isolation and overcome stigma [10]. Other people may be more private and may prefer not to discuss their personal lives or health information with anyone else. That reaction is perfectly normal, as well.

There are many AIDS service organizations (ASOs) that offer support and information to people living with HIV. ASOs are great places to find helpful, non-judgmental people to talk with, and many offer support groups. Joining a support group and talking about your feelings in a safe space may help you handle your concerns. Some people feel uncomfortable in groups and may prefer to speak to someone one-on-one. An ASO may be able to connect you with someone to talk to. Click here [11] to find an ASO in the US.

Finding networks or others who are living with HIV might also help you not feel alone. Be sure to check out The Well Project’s blog, A Girl Like Me [12], for first-hand accounts of women living with HIV in different parts of the world and how each of them has dealt with her HIV diagnosis.

It Is Better to Know

Once you know that you are living with HIV, you can take charge of your health and take steps to remain healthy. Getting informed about HIV and its treatment [13] will help you make the best medical decisions for you. The latest national and international guidelines [14] recommend that all people diagnosed with HIV start treatment right away.

If you do not have health insurance, an ASO may be able to guide you in getting coverage for your HIV care and other health needs. In the US, the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program exists to ensure that people living with HIV who have no health insurance (or not enough health insurance to cover their needs) can get high-quality HIV care and HIV drugs, as well as other support services. The program funds local services. Most of these services provide help regardless of immigration status.
Finding the right health care provider is important for getting good care. If possible, look for someone who specializes in treating HIV and has experience with many patients living with HIV.

Even though there is no cure [15] for HIV, there are many HIV drugs [16] that help keep the virus under control. Newer HIV drugs are much more effective, are easier on your body, and have fewer side effects [17] than the older drugs. These drugs help people to live long and healthy lives with HIV.

If you are in the US, there are many ways to get HIV drugs, which vary depending on your income and in some cases on your immigration status. If you need help getting HIV care and drugs, check https://findhivcare.hrsa.gov/ [18] to find a medical provider funded through the Ryan White program, which does not ask about immigration status.

It is important that you get information and work with your health care provider to decide which treatments are best for you. While there are many good places to get information, some may be false or misleading. Check the information you are getting with your health care provider or compare it to other reliable sources to make sure it is accurate. Remember, there are no "miracle" cures. If it sounds too good to be true, it is probably not true.

Try not to rush into decisions when you are still coming to terms with your diagnosis. Remember, you are in charge of your own health care. Take your time and learn about your options. Unless you are very ill and need to make treatment decisions quickly, you have time to think things through. For more information, see our fact sheet on Considerations Before Starting HIV Treatment [19].

**HIV and Women**

You are not alone. Globally, women make up almost half of all people living with HIV - that's almost 18 million women living with HIV. In the US, approximately one in four people newly diagnosed with HIV is a woman. There are many women living with HIV who can provide information, support, and advice.

For some people, keeping to yourself can make the process of moving forward after the diagnosis more difficult. Others may find it easier to think things through in private. If anyone threatens you with violence or is abusive when you reach out to them, it is time to step away. Take yourself and any children you have to a safe place and talk with someone you trust. You need and deserve a positive environment and supportive people in your life. For more information, see our fact sheet on Violence Against Women and HIV [20].

*Important:* If you are feeling threatened right now, call 911 or the National Domestic Violence hotline in the US at 800-799-SAFE [1-800-799-7233; or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)]. You can also search for a safe space online at Domestic Shelters [21].

Also, be careful not to put your family's welfare ahead of your own. When you take care of yourself, you are doing something good for yourself and your family. Making sure you are as healthy as you can be is part of supporting them. For more information, see our fact sheet on Women and HIV [22].

**Make a New Start**

Being diagnosed with HIV is life changing; however, it does not change the essence of who you are. HIV is a virus. Learn to see yourself as a person living with HIV, not a victim. You can do this by getting informed, taking charge of your health care, and learning how to manage HIV. There are many resources to help you on this new path (see the resource section below).

You may find that some of the priorities in your life now change. This can be a good thing. Facing a serious illness can prompt people to make their lives better. Many people living with HIV make positive changes, such as breaking bad habits like drinking too much [23] or smoking [24].
serious as this chronic condition can be, your life can still be full and healthy. Do not give up on
yourself or your dreams.

**Useful Articles for People Newly Diagnosed With HIV**

Quick links to related fact sheets or resources by The Well Project for those seeking information on
HIV or HIV Treatment:

- [What Is HIV?](#) [25]
- [HIV Transmission](#) [26]
- [Safer Sex](#) [27]
- [Oral Sex: What's the Real Risk?](#) [28]
- [Women and HIV](#) [22]
- [Pregnancy and HIV](#) [6]
- [Disclosure and HIV](#) [9]
- [Considerations Before Starting HIV Treatment](#) [19]
- [Undetectable Equals Untransmittable: Building Hope and Ending HIV Stigma](#) [3]

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