Did You Just Test HIV+?

Submitted on Jun 19, 2019

Normal Feelings

The first step in getting through this difficult period is to understand that these feelings are normal responses to your diagnosis. Ignoring them will not make them go away. In fact, ignoring or resisting how you feel is one of the best ways to help those uncomfortable emotions stay on. 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.  

Anger, fear, and sadness are emotions that many people with serious chronic illnesses experience. You may be scared that you will become sick or will not see the children in your life grow up. Or maybe you are afraid that you will not achieve your life goals. In the beginning, it may seem that testing positive is a death sentence, but this is definitely not true. There is life after a positive test. In fact, many people living with HIV (HIV+) lead full and healthy lives.

You may also feel that you are now damaged in some way and that no one will love you because you are living with HIV. Or you may blame yourself for getting HIV and ask yourself, "How could I have let this happen to me?" Try to be gentle with yourself. Guilt and shame can be destructive. Try to have some compassion for yourself and forgive yourself, if necessary. You have just gotten bad news and face changes and challenges ahead. If forgiving yourself or 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 [4] 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 [5] and Getting Connected [4].

Many newly diagnosed people may want to speak with others in the same situation. This can help you get out of isolation and overcome stigma [6]. 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 reduce fears and concerns. ASOs offer support groups in many parts of the US and elsewhere. Click here [7] to find an ASO in the US. To find services across the world, visit aidmap's e-atlas [8].

Finding networks or others who are in similar situations might also help you not feel alone. Be sure to check out The Well Project's blog, "A Girl Like Me [9]" 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

As upsetting as testing positive can be, you are better off knowing. Once you know that you are living with HIV, you can take charge of your health and have the best chance to prevent HIV from getting worse. Getting informed about HIV and its treatment [10] will help you make the best of your situation. The latest national and international guidelines 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.

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 for HIV, there are many HIV drugs [11] that help keep the virus under
control. Much has been learned about how to use these drugs more easily and effectively, and with fewer side effects [12]. These drugs allow many 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.

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.

Learning that you are living with HIV may make you feel as if you have lost control over your life. 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. You can decide which treatments you use and when you use them. 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 [13].

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. It is a good idea to reach out to others, but if anyone threatens you with violence or is abusive, it is time to step away from them. 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 [14].

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 [15]. If you live outside the US, please go to the Hot Peach Pages [16] to find help near you.

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 [17].

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 [18] or smoking [19]. As serious as this chronic condition can be, there is good reason to have hope that your life will 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

- Sign Up / Login
- My Account
- HIV Information
- A Girl Like Me
HIV or HIV Treatment:

- **What Is HIV?** [20]
- **HIV Transmission** [21]
- **Safer Sex** [22]
- **Oral Sex: What's the Real Risk?** [23]
- **Women and HIV** [17]
- **Pregnancy and HIV** [24]
- **Disclosure and HIV** [5]
- **Considerations Before Starting HIV Treatment** [13]

Tags:

- newly diagnosed with HIV [25]
- HIV diagnosis [26]
- tested positive for HIV [27]
- HIV positive [28]
- HIV+ [29]
- just diagnosed with HIV [30]
- think I have HIV [31]
- Symptoms of HIV [32]
- what are symptoms of AIDS [33]
- am I HIV+ [34]
- HIV transmission [35]
- getting HIV [36]
- HIV infection [37]
- living with AIDS [38]
- hiv symptoms [39]
- HIV women [40]
- What is HIV [41]
- HIV and AIDS [42]
- HIV/AIDS [43]
- HIV Virus [44]
- Information on AIDS [45]
- HIV statistics [46]
- HIV medication [47]
- HIV drug [48]
- HIV drugs [49]
- info on AIDS [50]
- fact sheets HIV [51]

Additional Resources

Select the links below for additional material.

- Newly Diagnosed with HIV (Avert) [52]
- Newly Diagnosed (Terrence Higgins Trust, United Kingdom) [53]
- HIV/AIDS Resource Center for the Newly Diagnosed (TheBody) [54]
- Just diagnosed with HIV (CATIE) [55]
- Newly Diagnosed (POZ) [56]
- Just Diagnosed (aidsmap) [57]
Recently Diagnosed (Positive Women Victoria, Australia) [58]
What Are the First Steps a Woman Should Take When Diagnosed With HIV? (EmpowHER, video) [59]
Watch Trans People Talk About How They Coped With Their HIV Diagnosis (TheBody) [60]
Just Diagnosed: Next Steps After Testing Positive for HIV (AIDSinfo) [61]
Newly Diagnosed? Words of Encouragement from HIV-Positive Women (TheBody) [62]
Resources: Techniques that may help manage your HIV status (Be-Resilient.org, United Kingdom) [63]

Source URL: https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/did-you-just-test-hiv

Links
[1] https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/did-you-just-test-hiv
[2] https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/%C2%BFacaba-de-recibir-resultado-positivo-de-la-prueba-del-vih
[12] https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/side-effects
[19] https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/smoking-and-tobacco-use
[20] https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/what-are-hiv-aids
[21] https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/hiv-transmission
[22] https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/safer-sex
[26] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-diagnosis
[27] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/tested-positive-hiv
[28] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-positive
[29] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv
[31] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/think-i-have-hiv
[32] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/symptoms-hiv
Did You Just Test HIV+?
Published on The Well Project
(https://www.thewellproject.org)

[33] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/what-are-symptoms-aids
[34] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/am-i-hiv-0
[35] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-transmission
[36] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/getting-hiv
[37] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-infection
[38] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/living-aids
[39] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-symptoms
[40] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-women
[41] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/what-hiv
[42] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-and-aids
[43] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hivaids
[44] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-virus
[45] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/information-aids
[46] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-statistics
[47] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-medication
[48] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-drug
[49] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/hiv-drugs
[50] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/info-aids
[51] https://www.thewellproject.org/tags/fact-sheets-hiv
[59] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAhk7uErET4
[63] https://be-resilient.org/resources