Dating and HIV

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Meeting Someone

Dating can be tricky for anyone, but if you are living with HIV (HIV+), you have some extra things to think about. Two important things to consider are:

1. Whom do I date (positive or negative person)?
2. When do I tell him/her?

If you are looking for a positive partner, consider going to places (online and in person) where you will meet other people living with HIV. These include HIV-focused support groups, conferences, or dating websites such as [www.hivnet.com][2], [www.pozmatch.com][3], [personals.poz.com][4], [www.hivpeoplemeet.com][5], [www.positivesingles.com][6], [www.positivesdating.com][7], [www.hivpassions.com][8], and [www.hivpoz.net][9].
If it does not matter to you whether your partner is positive or negative, you can focus more on traditional methods – singles events, places of worship, internet dating websites, online dating/personals ads, or networking through friends.

Disclosure

For many women living with HIV, the big issue is disclosure [10]. How and when do you tell? There is no one easy or perfect way to tell someone you are living with HIV.

Often, it is not how or when you tell, but whom you tell. If a potential partner is going to find your status unacceptable, it may not matter when you tell him/her. Similarly, if a person is going to accept you and your diagnosis, timing of disclosure may not matter (as long as you tell before having sex).

There are two main approaches to when to tell:

Tell and Kiss

Tell before the first kiss, often before the first date.

- Plus side: Less emotional attachment before a possible rejection
- Minus side: More people find out that you have HIV

Kiss and Tell

Wait until after a few dates when you feel comfortable with the person.

- Plus side: No need to disclose to every date; more privacy
- Minus side: Potential "why didn't you tell me before?" reaction

Is one of these approaches better than the other? Not really – it is a personal choice.

Tell Before Sex

You may wish to wait to disclose your status until after a sexual encounter for fear of rejection or embarrassment. There are several reasons why it may be safer for you NOT to do this:

1. Even if you practice safer sex [11] -- including having an undetectable viral load [12] which makes transmission to your partners effectively impossible [13] -- and even if your partner does not acquire HIV by this contact, it is illegal in many states and countries [14] to engage in sex without disclosing. To look at the HIV laws in each state of the US, go to this website [15].
2. If you have unprotected sex, you are in danger, too. You can still get other STDs [16], such as herpes, chlamydia, or another strain of HIV.
3. Some people lose their trust in sexual partners who hide important information. How would you feel if a date waited until after the two of you had sex to mention that he or she was married?
4. You may increase the chances that your partner will react with anger or violence [17]

HIV Dating Tips

- Consider having "the talk" well before you find yourself in a sexual situation
Tell the other person when you are both sober
Read up on HIV, safer sex [11], treatment as prevention [18], and HIV transmission [19]. It will make it easier for you to talk about living with HIV.
If you date a person living with HIV, do not spend so much time caring for him or her that you do not care for yourself
If you are concerned about a really negative or possibly violent [17] reaction, consider disclosing in a public place or with a friend present
Get advice from those who have done this before. Attend a support group [20] for women living with HIV and ask others how they handle disclosure and dating.
Be prepared for rejection. It is important to remember that dating is a process of finding the right person for you. Whether or not you are living with HIV, dating almost always includes some rejection and almost everyone has some trial runs before finding that special person!

Other Dating Issues for People Living with HIV

Some women living with HIV find it hard to think about dating because they feel less desirable or less appealing than HIV-negative women. It is important to remember that there is much more to you than your HIV. Your HIV status is not a reflection of your self-worth; try not to let it affect your standards. You do not have to "settle" for being alone or being with a person who is wrong for you because you are living with HIV.

There is no need to be afraid to have love in your life. Look for a loving relationship with a person who wants to be with you for you. Sex and being sexy [21] can be important and exciting parts of your relationship. If you feel worried or guilty about the possibility of infecting your partner, make sure you know how to protect him or her by practicing safer sex [11].

Many women feel ashamed of or embarrassed by their HIV status when dating. These feelings are normal. However, if these feelings last and prevent you from dating, or lead to depression [22] or isolation, it is important to get help. You may feel a good bit of relief even from telling one person you can trust. You may find a support group or therapist [23] helpful.

Once you connect with others, you will probably begin to feel more self-confident. As you feel better about yourself, you will likely remember how loving you can be - not just with yourself, but with others. And who knows? That love might turn into romance before too long.

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Additional Resources

Select the links below for additional material related to dating and HIV.

- [Dating Issues for Women with HIV (TheBody)](https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/dating-and-hiv)
- [The 9 Essential Rules for Writing Your Online Dating Profile (Huffington Post)](http://www.hivnet.com/)
- [Virtual You: Tips for Writing Your Personal Online Profile (TheBody)](http://www.pozmatch.com/)
- [Healthier Relationships (Be-Resilient.org)](http://personals.poz.com/)
- [Dating and HIV (BABES)](https://www.positivesingles.com/)
- [Dating with HIV: Two Seattle Women Share Their Stories (MYNorthwest)](http://www.hivpoz.net)
- [What It's Like to Tell the Person You're Seeing You Have HIV (Women's Health)](https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/sexually-transmitted-infections-or-diseases-stis-or-stds)
- [HIV Criminalization and Women](https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/hiv-criminalization-and-women)
- [Violence against Women and HIV](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/policies/law/states/index.html)
- [HIV Information/Infection/Transmission](https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/violence-against-women-and-hiv)

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