

Understanding Your HIV Positive Test Result

Your medical provider has just told you that you are HIV positive. That means you are infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). If left untreated, HIV can weaken your immune system and make you vulnerable to infections and other illnesses. It is normal to feel upset and worried when you find out you have HIV. However, you should know that HIV is now considered a treatable chronic disease. That means HIV can be managed with medications, similar to diabetes or high blood pressure. Although HIV cannot be cured, we have excellent medications available that will help you live a long, healthy, and productive life.

HIV Treatment

Your medical provider will order lab tests to determine how your immune system is functioning and which medication(s) would be best for you. Your provider will explain more about HIV, some of the available treatments to fight the disease, and the importance of taking your medications every day (adherence). He or she will answer any questions you have, and may refer you to an HIV specialist. Pharmacists, nurses, and social workers who specialize in HIV care can also provide information and support.

Your HIV provider will recommend that you start HIV medications, ideally right away. HIV medications are taken just once or twice a day. If you take them every day as prescribed, your immune system will become stronger and you will be less likely to develop symptoms or illnesses related to HIV.

Common Concerns

Can I pass HIV to others?

Yes, HIV can be passed (transmitted) from someone with HIV infection to someone without HIV, mainly through sexual contact or blood-to-blood contact (for example, by sharing equipment used to inject drugs). It also can be passed from an HIV-positive mother to her child during pregnancy or childbirth. HIV cannot be spread by hugging, kissing, or sharing the same linens, towels, or dishes. People whose HIV is well controlled on medication have a much lower risk of passing it to others. And, condoms are very effective in preventing the transmission of HIV during sex, if they are used correctly and consistently. Condoms are strongly recommended.

What else can I do to stay healthy?

It is very important that people with HIV maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. Your provider will have some suggestions for you. These may include eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, drinking lots of water, limiting alcohol use, and getting plenty of sleep. Your provider will recommend certain vaccinations to prevent other infections, and may make other suggestions based on your individual needs.

Stay connected to friends and family members. You will need to tell your sex partner(s) about your HIV, but you are not obligated to tell anyone else, including your employer. Your feelings about talking to others about HIV may change as you become more comfortable with your diagnosis.

You may wish to have your partner accompany you to a clinic visit to provide support and to have his or her questions and concerns addressed. You can request a referral to a social worker or therapist.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health
Administration

Who can I talk to about my diagnosis and follow-up treatment?

Stay in touch with your health care provider so you can ask any questions about your diagnosis, medications, or side effects. It is very important that you take your medication as prescribed every day. Do not skip doses or stop taking your medications unless directed to do so by your provider. You should discuss follow-up care with your provider including lab tests and future appointments (at HIV and other clinics).

If you have a partner who is HIV negative, your partner may want to consider using PrEP. PrEP is a pill that can be taken once a day to prevent HIV infection. PrEP is very effective if it is taken every day and combined with other prevention methods, such as using condoms. You can talk to your provider about ways to obtain PrEP.

Additional Resources

Veterans Health Administration

- ▶ Understanding an HIV Diagnosis
<https://www.hiv.va.gov/patient/diagnosis/index.asp>
- ▶ Information about PrEP
<https://www.hiv.va.gov/products/prep-patient-factsheets.asp>

Project Inform

- ▶ Understanding an HIV diagnosis
<https://www.projectinform.org/hivhealth/>
- ▶ Information about PrEP
<http://www.projectinform.org/prep/>