Healthy Mind, Healthy Body

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HIV-positive people who enjoy good psychological well-being are more likely to adhere to their antiretroviral (ARV) regimen. In fact, in a recent study of mixed-HIV-status heterosexual couples, an absence of symptoms of depression was the only factor that predicted good adherence.

Steven Safren, PhD, the director of behavioral medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and the paper's lead author, says that HIV treatment programs "should consider assessing and intervening with individuals who may have mental health concerns."

However, mental health treatment does not offer a clear-cut route to improved adherence rates. In some other studies, Safren points out, psychological treatment has improved mental health but not adherence rates. Just the same, he says that it's vital to provide support for psychological health and for adherence.

"Once their mental health is cleared up or improved a bit, then someone may be more likely to benefit from other forms of adherence support," Safren says.

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