HIV and Other Conditions

You and your provider should address additional health concerns.

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“HIV care has gotten pretty cookie-cutter,” says Urbina, acknowledging the wide array of easy-to-take and highly effective treatment options available today. All the more reason for you and your provider to make time to address other conditions that impact your overall physical and mental health, longevity and quality of life.

These include:

Heart disease: Research shows that folks with HIV—even well-treated HIV—have a higher risk of coronary disease. So talk to your provider about what the two of you can do to lower your risk. Solutions include adjusting your diet, taking up exercise, quitting (or at least reducing) smoking and, if necessary, taking statin drugs to lower your cholesterol and better manage stress and anxiety.

Mental health: Depression, anxiety and a history of trauma are common among folks with HIV. But there’s a lot you can do to address such mental health issues. You can begin by improving your diet, starting an exercise routine and addressing weight gain. If you drink or do drugs, reducing or stopping your consumption of alcohol and substances can make a big difference as can talk therapy and medication. Sometimes something as simple as adopting a furry friend, like a dog or cat, can do the trick. So be honest with your provider about how often you feel happy versus sad, at peace versus anxious. A good provider will be there with options for you to try.

Cancer avoidance: Folks with HIV have a higher risk for certain cancers, such as lung, anal and cervical. Diet, exercise and smoking cessation can greatly reduce this risk, but so can key screenings, such as anal/cervical Pap smears and colonoscopies. Ask your provider what your risks are based on your age, gender, race and other factors and what you can do to minimize the risk.

Sexual and reproductive health: Do you want to get pregnant? Are you at risk for (or might you already have) sexually transmitted infections other than HIV? Is your sex life satisfactory? Are you experiencing or have you experienced sexual abuse? Guess what? Sex is a big part of life. Discussing it with your primary provider shouldn’t be off-limits. If they don’t bring it up, you should.

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