Newly Diagnosed?

These eight steps will put you on a path to a long and healthy life with HIV.

November 15, 2021 By Liz Highleyman

Being diagnosed with HIV can be shocking and upsetting, but with proper care, you can live a long and healthy life. Living with HIV can come with challenges, but it's no longer the death sentence it was once perceived to be. Start by working with a health care provider and surrounding yourself with support.

Get Informed

Knowing the benefits of HIV treatment may help calm your fears. The amount of information can seem overwhelming, but the more you know about HIV, the more empowered you'll be tfo get the care and treatment you need.

Find Support

A friend or family member can be a great source of support, but if you're not ready to tell anyone yet, that's OK. Talk to other people living with HIV who can understand what you're going through. Many HIV/AIDS service organizations offer support groups and case management to help with your needs.

Find a Doctor

Establishing a relationship with a health care provider is an essential first step. See a doctor who has experience with HIV care soon after your diagnosis.

Start Treatment

Experts advise that everyone diagnosed with HIV start antiretroviral treatment as soon as possible. Modern HIV medications are highly effective, more convenient and easier to tolerate than older meds. Many require just one pill a day—or one injection a month. Effective treatment can reduce your viral load to an undetectable level. There's no cure for HIV, so it's important to keep taking your medications.

Prevent HIV Transmission

People on effective antiretroviral treatment with an undetectable viral load don't transmit HIV to others through sex (known as Undetectable Equals Untransmittable, or U=U). Condoms prevent transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. If you inject drugs, use a new

syringe every time. If you're in a relationship with an HIV-negative partner, discuss pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

Figure Out Your Finances

HIV can pose financial challenges. Private health insurance plans, state Medicaid programs and Medicare vary in terms of what they cover and how easy it is to access care. A health insurance plan offered by the Affordable Care Act or care provided through the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program may be an option. HIV/AIDS service organizations often have financial navigators, and many drug companies offer payment assistance programs.

Improve Your Overall Health

An HIV diagnosis can be an opportunity to take steps to improve your overall health. These include eating a balanced diet, getting enough exercise, maintaining a healthy weight and getting adequate sleep. If you smoke, consider quitting. Ask your doctor which tests and vaccines you should receive. Many people living with HIV have other health conditions. Work with your health care team to get appropriate treatment.

Take Care of Your Mental Health

It's normal to feel anxiety, sadness or depression after an HIV diagnosis. Exercise, yoga, prayer or meditation can often help relieve stress. Talk to your health care team about mental health resources, including therapists and support groups.

While learning about HIV and keeping yourself and your partners healthy, know that you are not alone in this fight. You can survive and thrive with HIV.

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