10 Ways to Survive and Thrive With HIV

Living with HIV is definitely a challenge—but it's easier than you think.

January 27, 2014 By POZ Staff

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1. Know your status.

One in every five people living with HIV in the United States don't know they're positive. Protect your health (and that of countless others!) by taking a quick blood or oral swab test.

2. Connect to care.

Managing HIV involves teamwork, and establishing a mutually respectful relationship with your doctor, physician assistant or nurse is a major play for good health.

3. Consider treatment.

The dark days of AZT are over, and HIV treatment is now easier and safer than ever. Though side effects are possible, treatment prolongs health and survival, and it reduces the risk of HIV transmission.

4. Talk with your doctor.

Now, more than ever, your doc needs to know what's going on in your life. Using alcohol and drugs? Taking other meds? Depressed or anxious? Problems sleeping, eating or having sex? Your doctors won't judge you—and they can't help if they don't know there's a problem.

5. Take your meds.

Every. Single. One. Skipping doses can have serious consequences, like making you immune to HIV treatment. If you struggle with adherence, talk to your health care provider, ASAP.

6. Quit smoking.

Tobacco use greatly increases your risk of heart disease and cancer, especially if you have HIV. If you're willing to quit, your health care provider can help.

7. Learn as much as you can.

The more you know about HIV, the better you'll understand why the above steps are so important. POZ.com is a great place to start.

8. Get the services you need.

Need health insurance? Housing? Income assistance? Ask for a referral to consult with a social worker or case manager. There are tons of programs out there that can hook you up.

9. Find emotional support.

Surround yourself with family and friends who are there for you, in good times and bad. Or, meet new people in support groups and online discussion boards who understand where you're coming from.

10. Know your rights.

If you think you've been discriminated against or aren't sure if you're required to disclose your HIV status to sexual partners, contact your local HIV/AIDS organization to learn more.

For more info about how to survive and thrive with HIV, check out the POZ Focus on Your Whole Health.

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