5 Ways to Stay Positive

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Living with HIV is often not the worst experience it used to be but it still has the ability to affect how you look at life. Whether you've recently learned your diagnose or living with it for years, one may experience the emotional highs and lows of knowing dealing with the disease. It's those low moments which can impact the dealing of your HIV status as mood has a connection to managing our healthy self.

There are studies that show that how you feel, has a relationship with your health. One recent study examined the connection between laughter and found that when you laugh, the diaphragm becomes a powerful pump for your lymphatic circulation, much like your heart serves as the central pump that propels blood through your blood vessels. This assists the lymphatic vessels in carrying this fluid through your body and helps your lymph nodes to clean and filter this fluid, removing waste products, dead cells, and even unwanted microorganisms. In essence, you're helping your immune system simply by laughing and feeling good.

I've always hated someone telling me to smile when I felt like crying, yet it seems they were onto something. Although the last thing you want is someone telling you the "Sun will come out tomorrow", there is an advantage to infusing positivity into your life. I speak from experience and share the top five positive traits I adopt when sadness appears on the horizon.

1. Exercise- This has been my life saver and a contributor to my overall good health. There's something about going to the gym and feeling great after a workout. I can actually feel the difference when I don't go, as I'm more sluggish and likely to give into bad habits. Yet I'm fully aware that some may not care for a gym environment or have access to one; let alone the time. That's valid. My recommendation would be to do something, even if it's walking around the block during your work lunch break, creating your own gym in your garage or basement; even taking the stairs instead of the elevator. You'll soon see the positive attributes of working out.

2. Eating Well- Eliminating unhealthy foods has a connection to both how you feel and any workout routine one does. As people eat healthy, their moods improve, or visa verse — and as their moods improve, they cut their risk in half for a whole host of ills, from heart disease to diabetes, in part because they are more motivated to take good care of themselves. Certain foods contribute to one's mood and unhealthy foods, such as sugar and salty foods, does the opposite. This was hard for me to initially adopt as I lived on a fast food diet. Yet the shift in my waistline and mood came when I denied myself fast and junk food. I suggest anyone considering changing their diet, start eliminating one bad food/snack and introduce a healthy item at least once a month. That way it will feel doable. Also consider online meal trackers such as Noom (noom.com), which can help manage and changing your diet.

3. Friends- Having HIV, in some instances creates a sense of sadness and loss of control. This, of course, leads to depressive thoughts and one's mood. When I felt this way, instead of seeking out friends, I would do the opposite and isolate myself. I'm now aware that it's during those sad times I need to surround myself with friends. Of course, it has to be friends who are part of your positive support system. The worst thing to do is surround yourself with people who will only make you feel worse. The key is to not cut yourself off. Isolation can do so much damage on your positive self. Although you may want to huddle in bed and pull the covers you're your head, those are the times to connect with friends. Also, it has to be said connecting online with friends will never replace the face to face value.

4. Journal- I have to personally say that journaling my HIV, made a positive difference in how I manage and live with it. When I started to place my journey on paper, I never knew I was creating a roadmap which would later allow me the opportunity to look back and reflect on my progress. It also provided me a way to release all that 'stuff' which was in my head, adding to my negative mood. This isn't for everyone yet if one does commit to a journal, over time they will see the positive attributes it creates. You'll be surprised what comes out and in a therapeutic way, writing our own story creates a sense of empowerment.

5. Volunteer- Sometimes the act of doing for others, has a way to make one feel good. There are many opportunities to give back, especially to HIV-related services and programs. Whatever you decide to do, just know that your reward will be satisfying, not only to others but also yourself.

I'm sure there are other ways to stay positive and curious on what traits have others adopted. Love to hear ideas and suggestions.

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