5 Things an HIV-Negative Person Needs to Know When Dating a Positive Person

Advice from someone with HIV who's been in a serodiscordant relationship for 21 years

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The world of HIV has changed with so many advances being made. Including easier HIV regimens (requiring less pills), more prevention options such as PrEP and more media visibility of those sharing their HIV status, both celebrities and the common "Joe or Mary." Of course, the biggest change is the advent of U=U, which means that an undetectable viral load is untransmittable sexually.*

Sadly stigma continues to have an attachment to HIV, yet even that is shifting as there are more people open to dating someone living with the virus. I should know as I've been in a relationship for the past 21 years with a person who is HIV negative.

We met online during the AOL chat room times. At that time I was all about quickies and not really looking for a long-term relationship. Besides, because I was living with HIV I didn't think a relationship, long or short, was an option. I also thought I would only be attractive to someone who was HIV positive themselves, denied by others. Yet that turned out to not be true which took some risk of disclosure, but that disclosure affirmed to me that not everyone has hesitations dating someone living with the virus.

Sometimes people assume my partner is positive, and I have to correct their ignorance. In fact, we have had the most loving relationship we could squeeze out of the years we've been together. In that spirit, I would like to share some of my insights of being in a positive-negative relationship with advice for negative individuals who have recently started a relationship with someone positive or considering.

- You can still have a healthy sexual relationship

It was once thought that being in a sexual relationship with someone positive carried the risk that their partner would pass the virus to them. Even before PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis, a daily pill the HIV-negative person takes) there was little risk as long as couples were practicing safe sex and using condoms. But with the arrival of PrEP, there's even less of a chance. For those unfamiliar with PrEP, is when people at very high risk for HIV take HIV medicines daily to lower their chances of getting infected. PrEP can stop HIV from taking hold and spreading throughout your body. It is

highly effective for preventing HIV if used as prescribed, but it is much less effective when not taken consistently. PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by more than 99%. Your risk of getting HIV from sex can be even lower if you combine PrEP with condoms and other prevention methods. It must be stated that PrEP is only effective against HIV and not other sexually transmitted infections such as herpes or chlamydia to name a few. So if either partner is having sex outside the relationship, whether you're negative or positive, you're both at risk to possible exposure to STIs.

- Don't freak out when we get a cold or some other ailment

Simply because we may catch a cold or get exposed to the flu doesn't mean you have to come at us like a Military Mom, ready to send us to the emergency room. As people living with HIV, we get sick just like everyone else. Yes, sometimes it may take a little longer to clear up, and other times it might even be so brief you wonder if we were faking it. But when those moments happen, depending on how much your partner likes to be smothered with TLC, simply don't start sizing them up for a casket. But a nice blanket with access to binge watch Netflix may make a difference.

- Don't take it personally if I don't want you to come to my medical appointments

Sometimes it may feel like we want our partner at every appointment we have with our HIV primary doctor, but it's really not necessary. There is some value to taking a partner to an appointment only to introduce the doctor to our new amour, but as a warning, if you go you'll discover something about our visits. They're boring. You'll learn we arrive on time for our appointment only to be seen late by the doctor and when we finally speak to the doctor, the visit itself may last less than 15 minutes. Then there's more waiting to draw blood for your labs of which results are not provided until another day. Some visits are anti-climatic. So if we say no, we're actually doing you a favor and saving you from boredom.

- Don't watch me take my pills every day

This is my own little irksome annoyance and something my partner did early on. Whenever I took my daily HIV medication he would watch me like a hawk with Disney tears of sympathy as if I was swallowing a fistful of knives, followed up with him asking if I was okay. When this happened on a daily basis early in the relationship, I was tempted to put on a Broadway production each time I took my meds. But finally had to tell him to stop. Yes, it shows that your partner cares but in an ironic way. It wasn't the pills that reminded me I had HIV, it was the increasing attention from my partner that reminded me of the disease. Others may feel different, but as I shared, this is one of my pet peeves. I feel there's no harm in occasionally asking your partner how their HIV medication regime is going but there's also a way of not being too intrusive.

- Don't love me any different

The last advice is the simplest one. When entering into a relationship with someone HIV positive,

don’t enter the relationship thinking you’re doing them a favor. Relationships are built on an equal playing field and not of one feeling they are either settling or someone coming into it as a savior. I would rather be alone if I knew my partner had those intentions. To have a long sustaining relationship, all you have to do is show love. It’s a simple as that. Our life doesn’t revolve 100% around HIV, so why would we want a relationship that does? But knowing that someone loves me for me, HIV status and all, is wonderful. Just prepare yourself for mutual affection.

And as a bonus:

- Don’t ever introduce me as your partner living with HIV. Simply don’t!

As shared, these are my own feelings when it comes to providing tips to HIV-negative individuals who are newly dating or thinking of dating some HIV positive.

I’d love to hear other tips that people have. Until then keep on loving!

*Note: the fact of U=U was added to the blog April 23, 2019. Thanks to readers for pointing out the oversight.

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