Dating and HIV

Dating can be tricky for women living with HIV. Whom do you tell and when? Get tips on meeting people, dating, disclosing, and more.

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Meeting Someone

Dating can be challenging for anyone. If you are living with HIV, there are some extra things to think about. Still, it is important to remember that there is much more to you than HIV.

Three important things you may consider are:

1. Whom do I date (another person living with HIV, or not)?
2. How do I meet them?
3. When do I tell them?

If you are looking for a partner living with HIV, consider going to places (online and in person) where you will meet other people living with HIV. These include HIV-focused support groups, conferences, or dating websites such as www.pozmatch.com, personals.poz.com, www.positivesingles.com, and www.hivpassions.com.

The Well Project community advisory board members Marissa Gonzalez and Louise Vallace chat about their history and thoughts on dating sites – and not limiting yourself.

If it does not matter to you whether your partner is or is not living with HIV, you can focus more on traditional methods – singles events, places of worship, internet dating websites, online

dating/personals ads, or networking through friends. For more information on dating across HIV statuses, please see our fact sheet on mixed-status (serodifferent) partnerships.

Louise and Marissa answer the question: Where do you go to meet people?

Disclosure

For many women living with HIV, one major consideration is disclosure. How and when do you tell? There is no one easy or perfect way to tell someone you are living with HIV.

Often, it is not how or when you tell, but whom you tell. If a potential partner is going to find your status unacceptable, it may not matter when you tell them. Similarly, if a person is going to accept you and your diagnosis, the timing of disclosure may not matter.

Marissa and Louise talk about self-acceptance and confidence when disclosing to potential new partners.

There are two main approaches to when to tell:

Tell and Kiss

Tell before the first kiss, or even before the first date.

- Plus side: Less emotional attachment before a possible rejection
- Minus side: More people find out that you are living with HIV

Kiss and Tell

Wait until after a few dates when you feel comfortable with the person.

- Plus side: No need to disclose to every date; more privacy
- Minus side: Potential “why didn’t you tell me before?” reaction

Is one of these approaches better than the other? Not really – it is a personal choice.

Louise shares a first-date disclosure story with a twist.

Disclosure and Sex

You may wish to wait to disclose your status until after a sexual encounter for fear of rejection or embarrassment. There are several reasons why it may be safer for you NOT to do this:

1. Even if you practice safer sex -- including having an undetectable viral load, which makes transmission to your partners impossible -- and even if your partner does not acquire HIV from this contact, laws in many states and countries unfairly punish people living with HIV for engaging in

sex without disclosing that they are living with HIV. For more information about this legal concern – including efforts by advocacy groups worldwide to change these unjust laws and practices – see our fact sheet on HIV Criminalization.

2. If you have sex without condoms or other barriers, you can still acquire other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as herpes, chlamydia, or another strain of HIV.
3. Some people lose their trust in sexual partners who hold back important information. How would it affect you if a date waited until after the two of you had sex to mention that they were married?
4. This may increase the possibility that a partner will react with anger or negativity – or with violence, which is never acceptable.

Marissa speaks directly to those who believe they could not date someone living with HIV.

Tips on Dating and Disclosure

- Being comfortable with yourself, and acceptance of your HIV status for yourself, may make disclosure easier and increase your confidence in doing so
- Read up on HIV, safer sex, treatment as prevention, HIV transmission, and U=U, , and remind yourself that there is no chance of transmitting HIV if you are on treatment and your viral load is undetectable with standard tests. It may make it easier for you to talk about living with HIV.
- Consider having “the talk” with a partner when you are both sober
- Regardless of your partner’s HIV status, do not spend so much time caring for them that you do not care for yourself
- If you are concerned about a really negative or possibly violent reaction, consider disclosing in a public place or with a friend present. Also consider whether you really want to be with a person who might react in this way.
- Remember that dating is also about companionship, conversation, shared interests, and many aspects other than sex.
- Get advice from those who have done this before. Attend a support group for women living with HIV and ask others how they handle disclosure and dating.
- Also remember that dating is a process of finding the right person for you. Whether or not you are living with HIV, dating almost always includes some rejection, and it is important to be prepared for that. Almost everyone has some trial runs before finding that special person!

Louise and Marissa challenge the notion that women living with HIV should be “grateful” when

someone wants to date them.

Other Dating Issues for People Living with HIV

Your HIV status is not a reflection of your self-worth; try not to let it affect your standards. You do not have to “settle” for being alone, or being with a person who is wrong for you, because you are living with HIV.

There is no need to be afraid to have love in your life. Look for a loving relationship with a person who wants to be with you for you. Sex and feeling sexy can be important and exciting parts of your relationship. If you feel worried or guilty about the possibility of transmitting HIV to your partner, remember that it is not possible if you are taking HIV drugs and your viral load stays undetectable. You can make sure you know how to protect one another by practicing other kinds of safer sex as well.

Some women may feel ashamed or embarrassed by their HIV status when dating. Living with HIV is nothing to be ashamed of. However, if these feelings continue and prevent you from dating, or lead to depression or isolation, it is important to get help. You may feel a good bit of relief even from telling one person you can trust. You may find a support group or therapist helpful.

Once you connect with others, you will probably begin to feel more self-confident. As you feel better about yourself, you will likely remember how loving you can be – not just with yourself, but with others. And remember: You deserve nothing less than the utmost respect, love, and affection – in all your relationships.

“Be comfortable in your skin,” says Marissa to Louise, “knowing that your diagnosis does not define you.”

Lea esta hoja informativa en español

The Well Project is a non-profit organization whose mission is to change the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a unique and comprehensive focus on women and girls across the gender spectrum. Visit their website, www.thewellproject.org, to access fact sheets (English and Spanish), blogs, and advocacy tools, and to join a global community of women living with HIV.

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