

# 8 Ways to Improve Your Health



**Healthy Living**  
*With HIV*

[www.patientedu.org/HIV](http://www.patientedu.org/HIV)

As you already know, HIV is a complex disease affecting many different parts of the body. Everyone with HIV has to remember and be responsible for a lot in a day—what you can do to stay fit, when to take your medications, how to prepare food safely, HIV-specific work issues, and how to keep your feelings in balance. The information contained in this brochure is meant to help with the daily challenges that you may face by providing simple tips on eight important issues for people with HIV.

## 1. Stay Healthy and Fit

Today, HIV is a chronic condition that can be treated so people can live a long, normal lifespan. Therefore, everyone with HIV should consider what to do to keep their bodies as healthy as possible. Maximizing health and preventing serious illnesses can prolong life.

**Before you start any new exercises, talk with your doctor to be sure that your exercise plan matches the needs of your body.** You can do many things as part of your daily routine to stay physically fit and healthy. Some ideas include:

- Walking or riding a bike to places like the store or work, rather than driving.
- Taking the stairs, instead of an elevator, to stretch and build muscle.
- Stretching, exercising, and working out to help reduce stress.
- Keeping in close contact with your health care providers so that you know what to do medically to maintain your health.

**Source:** Gary Rosard for TheBody.com.  
*Ten Things You Can Do to Improve Your Physical Fitness*  
([www.thebody.com/bp/10things/fitness.html](http://www.thebody.com/bp/10things/fitness.html)).



## 2. Value Working With Your Doctor

### Choose the right provider!

Find a health care team that shares the same approach and philosophy about your health and your HIV as you have. Write down and ask many questions during your initial office visit with new providers to make sure that you are comfortable with the team's approach.

### Establish a provider–patient relationship

Some patients do better when they take an active role in planning their own health care. These patients do a lot of reading on their own, and bring information to their providers. The patient and provider make health care decisions together. Other patients are more comfortable with the health care team making important decisions. Decide how you want to work with your provider.

*Be a partner  
in your own  
health!*

**Source:** Plus News, The HIV/AIDS News Service ([www.plusnews.org/Hdiaryentry.asp?reportID=16](http://www.plusnews.org/Hdiaryentry.asp?reportID=16)).



*Always take your anti-HIV medicine as prescribed by your health care team.*

## 3. Remember to Take Your Meds

You know that keeping up with your anti-HIV medications every day is important, but maybe you still miss a dose here and there. Here are a few tips to help remind you when it's time to take your medications!

- Set alarms ... to remind yourself to take your medications. Set a watch for when you're on the go, and an alarm at home for times when you're around the house.
- Mark your calendar ... to remind yourself to refill your prescriptions or to go to the doctor.
- Keep the medications in plain sight ... in the kitchen (away from the stove) or near your toothbrush—so that you notice and remember to take them.
- Use pill trays ... so you don't have to take the extra time to count out each dose every time.

**Source:** J. Buzz von Ornsteiner, Ph.D. for TheBody.com. *Ten Simple Things You Can Do...* ([www.thebody.com/bp/10things/meds.html](http://www.thebody.com/bp/10things/meds.html)).

## 4. Practice Food Safety

Food safety is very important because HIV and AIDS can put people at higher risk of becoming sick from eating foods on which bacteria have grown. For most people, a healthy immune system can take care of illnesses from food on its own. However, people with HIV often have immune systems that are *immunocompromised*, which means that they may not be able to fight these bacteria or germs.

Follow these simple steps to help save your body from the effects of food contamination:

### Store foods properly

- Keep the refrigerator cold (at or below 40°F).
- Store perishable foods in individual containers.

### Prepare your food carefully and according to the recipe

- Meat, chicken, and fish are ready after they are cooked long enough to kill any bacteria that may be present.
- Meat, chicken, or turkey should no longer be pink in the middle when it is done.



- Follow a cookbook's directions to guide you if you are unsure how long to cook a particular food.

### Don't cross contaminate your foods

- Two raw pieces of food on a plate or wooden cutting board can cause bacteria to spread from one to the other, called *cross contamination* of foods. Separate different types of raw foods (especially meat, chicken, and fish) while preparing them and use a plastic cutting board.
- Carefully wash your fruits and vegetables before eating or cooking them.



### Clean up the kitchen

- Wash all kitchen tools, utensils, and surfaces, including your hands with warm soapy water. This also helps avoid cross contamination of foods.
- Keep your kitchen clean. Use antibacterial cleansers on kitchen shelves, countertops, the refrigerator, and freezer. Replace sponges frequently, and wash hand towels often.



Avoiding food borne illnesses is necessary for everyone with HIV.

**Sources:** USFDA. *Eating Defensively: Food Safety Advice for Persons With AIDS* ([www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/aidseat.html](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/aidseat.html)); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Safe Food and Water* ([www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/brochure/food.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/brochure/food.htm)); and About.com (<http://aids.about.com/od/nutrition/a/hivfoodsafes.htm>).



## 5. Understand HIV and the Workplace

Certain workplaces, such as working with the elderly, with animals, or in health care settings or prisons may put you at risk for infection. There are steps you can take to protect yourself. Talk with your doctor about where you work. Here are some tips about HIV and working.

Wash your hands often, especially if you are around children or farm animals or have had your hands in the dirt. And try not to touch your nose or mouth. Using warm soapy water will help fight germs and prevent infection.

### Should I tell my employer about my HIV?

You are not legally obligated to disclose your HIV status unless your condition affects your ability to work. Since HIV is not transmitted by casual contact, your HIV status would rarely put your coworkers at risk of becoming infected.

### What if I need special accommodations to work?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects you so that employers are legally required to make “reasonable accommodations” for their employees. For example, under the ADA, em-

ployers must allow you time to go to the doctor and make reasonable accommodations with other schedules related to your health. Your employer is also obligated to reassign you as needed to open positions that are suited to any limitations you might have, and to buy equipment that allows you to work with your disability.

- It is up to you to request accommodations under the ADA.
- Most often, employers require medical documentation that you are disabled. This may require you to disclose your HIV status.

### Will I be able to get medical insurance through my employer?

You can get insurance from your employer if you have HIV. The cost should be the same as others pay in the company. However, some policies have pre-existing condition clauses, which require the employee to pay additional charges for coverage or to wait a specific time before filing a claim. Some policies even prevent coverage of pre-existing conditions. Before taking a job:

- Ask about pre-existing conditions and how they are handled.
- Remember, do not disclose your HIV status if asked.
- Get all the facts about prescription drug coverage under the employer’s health plan.

**Sources:** American Academy of Family Physicians (<http://familydoctor.org/248.xml>) and About.com (<http://aids.about.com/od/hivandtheworkplace/a/hivwork.htm>).



## 6. Battle Depression

Depression is very common among people with HIV. The symptoms of depression may not be obvious to you, though. Check off the symptoms below that apply to you. If you have more than one of these signs or symptoms, seek help from your doctor.

### Signs and symptoms of depression

- Feeling hopeless, sad, discouraged, or empty; an inability to experience pleasure
- Losing or gaining a significant amount of weight
- Not getting enough sleep (insomnia) or oversleeping (hypersomnia)
- Being “keyed up,” unable to sit still, anxious, restless, or sluggish
- Having slow speech and body movements; lack of responsiveness
- Feeling physically drained
- Having strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Having the inability to focus or difficulty making decisions
- Experiencing memory problems
- Being grouchy, easily annoyed, and frustrated by little things

### Seek help for depression

You may feel more anxious if you recognize several of the signs and symptoms of depression as feelings of your own. Your health care team will need to discuss your care for mental health and HIV. Be sure to make your doctors and therapists aware of all medications you’re taking because anti-depressants might interact with your anti-HIV medications and harm you. Remember, depression is treatable. Take charge of your mental health with these steps:

- Find an HIV/AIDS support group. If you can’t find one you like, talk to your case manager about locating one that meets your needs.
- Talk with a therapist. Be sure to find a licensed therapist who is a good match for you. Find out if your insurance covers therapy, and what type of therapist is covered—a licensed clinical social worker, psychologist, or a psychiatrist.
- Learn about your HIV condition and your medications. You can empower yourself by becoming an expert and helping others.
- If necessary, address your substance abuse issues. These may make it harder for you to cope with your HIV.



**Sources:** Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations ([www.afao.org.au/library\\_docs/resources/top25.pdf](http://www.afao.org.au/library_docs/resources/top25.pdf)); HelpGuide.org ([www.helpguide.org/mental/depression\\_signs\\_types\\_diagnosis\\_treatment.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_signs_types_diagnosis_treatment.htm)); J. Buzz von Ornsteiner, Ph.D. for TheBody.com. *Ten Simple Things You Can Do ...* ([www.thebody.com/bp/10things/emotional.html](http://www.thebody.com/bp/10things/emotional.html)); and National Institute of Mental Health Depression and HIV ([www.medhelp.org/NIHlib/GF-248.html](http://www.medhelp.org/NIHlib/GF-248.html)).

## 7. Get a Good Night's Sleep

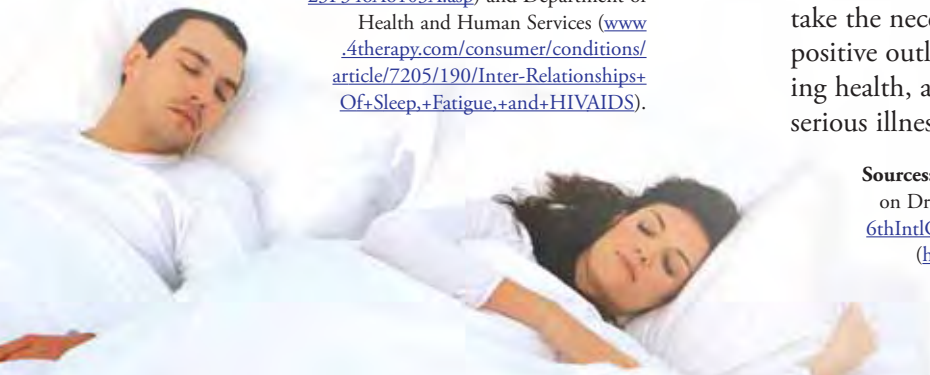
About a third of people with HIV have trouble sleeping. You may have trouble sleeping because of simple discomfort; disabling illness, worry, anxiety, or depression; treatment side effects; or substance use and abuse. However, getting enough sleep can reduce your risk of health problems, so try these measures to help you sleep.

### Managing sleep problems

- Avoid caffeinated products like soda, tea, and coffee before going to bed.
- Avoid napping during the day and schedule a regular time to go to sleep.
- Tell your doctor right away so you can get help and treatment if necessary.

'Sleeping tablets' are available and should only be used after talking with your health care provider. They can be used to help restore normal sleeping patterns. However, sleeping tablets often only help you fall asleep (they do not always ensure sleep through the night), and can make you feel drowsy the next day. Also, long-term use of some sleep medications can cause dependency, although newer medications are available that do not appear to cause this problem.

**Sources:** Aidsmap Patient Information ([www.aidsmap.com/en/docs/495A1E48-8735-4B2A-BBAE-23F346A6103A.asp](http://www.aidsmap.com/en/docs/495A1E48-8735-4B2A-BBAE-23F346A6103A.asp)) and Department of Health and Human Services ([www.4therapy.com/consumer/conditions/article/7205/190/Inter-Relationships+Of+Sleep,+Fatigue,+and+HIVAIDS](http://www.4therapy.com/consumer/conditions/article/7205/190/Inter-Relationships+Of+Sleep,+Fatigue,+and+HIVAIDS)).



## 8. Believe That a Long Life is Ahead

In recent years, anti-HIV medicine has become more effective and has greatly increased the life span of people with HIV and AIDS living in the US. As patients live longer, health care teams are emphasizing quality of life. This includes treating depression, managing side effects, coping with sleep disturbances, dealing with stigma, and managing stress. It also means dealing with co-morbidities such as hypertension, diabetes, and any concerns in an aging population.

The great news is people with HIV are living longer and have much to look forward to. However, living longer puts people with HIV at risk for diseases that they might not have thought about before HIV became a treatable condition. Work closely with your health care providers and take the necessary steps to keep healthy. Having a positive outlook, eating well, exercising, maximizing health, and taking action to prevent other serious illnesses can prolong life.

**Sources:** Reported by Jules Levin, NATAP 6th Intl Congress on Drug Therapy in HIV Infection ([www.natap.org/2002/6thIntlCongress/day2.htm](http://www.natap.org/2002/6thIntlCongress/day2.htm)) and Dan Ullrich for HealthLink (<http://healthlink.mcw.edu/article/1031002311.html>).



To learn more about HIV and AIDS, visit **Healthy Living With HIV** at:  
[www.patientedu.org/HIV](http://www.patientedu.org/HIV).

*Brought to you by:*

# Healthy Living *With HIV*



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