

Tips for Living Well

These are some great tips for living well - from those who know. They were given the thumbs up by straight men and women living with HIV/AIDS at a 'Practical Stuff' workshop in Sydney, run by Pozhet.

1. Make the first move - change your routine

Morning ritual - quiet time, no music, go for a walk near the river, feed the birds and sit and take time over breakfast. Rob

Making the first move means taking control of your health, making your own decisions and developing new ways to manage your HIV that suit you and fit in with your lifestyle. This 'managing HIV' is not just about HIV treatments, viral load tests and CD4 counts. It's about your whole lifestyle, the way you live and the choices you make. And if you're in a rut then change your routine. It could be something simple like putting aside some special time in the day to do some activity that's about you only and for you only.

2. A healthy fix - find a quality doctor

My doctor is really a friend, always helpful, and she feels more like family than a doctor. Her advice helped me increase my T-Cells. Ruby

I used to accept everything my doctor said and I agreed to do things I knew I couldn't stick to. Now it's different. I have a more honest relationship and say when I can't do something, so we look for other ways that suit me. I am happier with this. Lily

I just decided I wanted a new doctor after six years because I wanted to hear a new voice and a new face talking about my health. Mike

The relationship with your doctor is among the most important relationships you can have over many years. You'll need to visit a doctor for regular check-ups and blood tests and to find out how well your immune system is getting along. So making a visit to the doctor shouldn't feel like a bad experience for you. Most people choose a doctor or specialist with HIV expertise who they feel they can easily talk with and who will listen to them. You'll want to feel confident enough to tell them you're feeling bad as well as you're feeling good.

3. Make some noise - seek a new opportunity

When I found out I was positive I thought I haven't got much time. Years later I'm still here. There's no reason I can't start doing new things. Matt

There's no shame about seeking help. Danny

I'm learning new things to educate myself. It's how I keep my hope present. Carlos

Okay, so you don't want HIV to take over your life. But you want to get connected to anything that can help as soon as possible. There are hundreds of positive and negative men and women who want to help you with your choices. With well over 300 different HIV/AIDS agencies and service providers in New South Wales all offering different types of support, there's plenty of people to help. They are all listed in *Contacts*, which is the directory of services for people living with HIV/AIDS, which is also available online. You can find medical and complementary therapies to try and there are also new things like cooking, job opportunities, volunteering, lunches and group outings, hobby craft courses and even pet care! And you'll be connecting with like-minded people who live with HIV/AIDS as well. Make some noise and get connected. You can handle it!

4. Fix your spark plugs - be creative around old habits

Counselling has helped me work through lots of issues. It's great to have someone who listens and understands. Maria

The greatest difficulty in me getting care and support is me asking for it! Mike

Stress can make a mess – get some counselling

You don't have to be in trouble to go to a counsellor. It's a well-tested method for sorting through your feelings and finding better ways to cope with living with the virus. Most counselling sessions are about one hour long. You sit down in private with your counsellor and tell them how you've been going, then you work out different ways to get the best out of the things that have happened to you with HIV. You could talk about your health, a new relationship or things going on with your family. You choose! There are countless positive people and their partners who swear that counselling made all the difference to them in getting on with their lives.

Stress can make a mess out your life. When you're stressed it is more difficult to remember what you are meant to be doing to keep yourself well. Depression is also a very common illness for many HIV positive people. It's different from unhappiness or sadness. Depression is a constant low mood that can last for several weeks or longer, and it's not all in your head. It is very important if you're feeling depressed to tell your doctor, as it's an illness that can recur many times, and it's easily treatable.

Move that bod - exercise

The cheapest way to improve your health is by exercising. Exercise boosts your energy levels, reduces fatigue, can help with some of the changes in your body shape and can make you feel great. A simple thing like a daily walk can do wonders by getting your heart pumping oxygen-rich blood. Any small exercise you do just a few times a week can improve the way you look and feel. Ask your HIV/AIDS physiotherapist to put together a short program of exercise that suits your body type.

Put the EAT back in your grEAT body

Is your daily life one thing after another, so that you don't have time to work out how to eat well? Losing weight can be bad because it makes it more difficult for your body to fight infection and recover. Choosing and eating food that's good for you is an important part of the battle against HIV/AIDS. The hard part is setting up a plan that will help you eat well - something that is right for your lifestyle. How much time do you have to cook a meal? Do you have time to eat in the morning or are you rushing out the door? Do you have to get the kids to school? When do you have to take those pills?

The first step is to talk to an HIV/AIDS dietician or nutritionist who knows about food and HIV. These days they also run cooking classes for positive people to help them prepare tasty meals.



Get the right tools - complementary therapies

There are many complementary therapies offered to HIV positive people that will help to improve your mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. They include: herbal medicine, massage, Chinese herbs, acupuncture, meditation, yoga, homeopathy, reiki, reflexology, shiatsu etc. The use of vitamin supplements is most popular.

More pills - vitamins, minerals, and nutrients

Studies of nutrient levels in positive people find they can be depleted, increased or unchanged. Positive people should resist thinking that they can fix HIV by just taking handfuls of vitamins. At present there is no convincing evidence that vitamins, minerals, nutrients and herbs can, in themselves, stop an HIV illness. In some cases overdosing on vitamins can damage your immune system. You do, however, need vitamins if you do not eat properly either because of illness or heavy drinking, or you haven't got enough money to spend on food. Most HIV specialists will recommend just a multivitamin and a healthy diet. Vitamins and supplements can be bought at wholesale prices from ACON's Vitamin Service.

Better habits

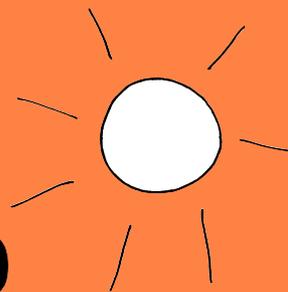
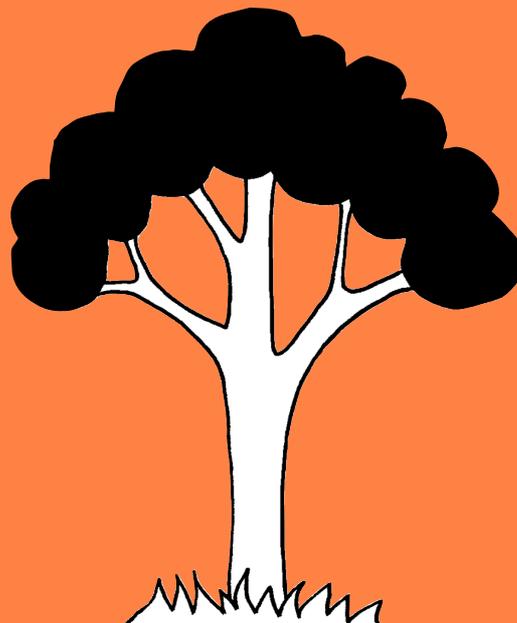
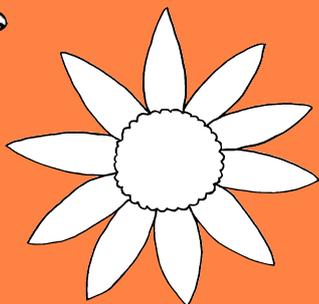
Many positive people wonder whether drinking can speed up the development of AIDS. Moderate drinking isn't harmful but heavy drinking can affect your immune system badly and slow down recovery from infections. If you drink heavily you could also forget to eat good food.

Smoking has two main effects on your immune system. Firstly, it makes it harder for air to move in and out of your lungs and this means that less oxygen is taken to the tissues for use in energy production. Secondly, the carbon monoxide inhaled from cigarette smoke damages almost everything inside you. Any combination of smoking, drinking too much alcohol or coffee, not getting enough sleep and skipping meals will run you down. Giving up isn't easy but you can find ways to be creative around cutting back. There is help. Just ask your doctor, counsellor, social worker, dietician or peer support worker.

Kick yourself a goal!

Making changes and kicking old habits can help you feel good about yourself especially if they're all about changing simple things to improve your health. For example you may decide you'll learn to cook two or three new meals that are packed with goodies or you may decide to get up earlier in the morning and go for a short walk before eating breakfast. Choose whatever you'd like to do.

Give yourself a moment to think about what changes you want to make for yourself in the 'Kicking old habits!' chart on the next page. Then rank them from 1 to 10 in terms of 'very important' to 'not so important'. In the 'How to do it' column write down a few thoughts on how you think you could go about giving yourself a start. Don't forget to give yourself a reward when you've scored that goal!



Kicking old habits!	What changes do you want to make?	How important 1 -10	How to do it?	Reward Yes or No?
Drinking alcohol				
Keeping fit				
Keeping friends				
Love and sex				
Making friends				
My family				
My treatments				
Recreational drugs				
Smoking cigarettes				
Working				
Education				
Getting support				
Having fun				
Money				
New hobbies				
Sleeping				
Spirituality and beliefs				
Stress				
Travel				
Using complementary therapies				

5. The next big thing - there will be a cure

*I discovered that negative thoughts affected my physical and mental health.
Ruby*

I'm focusing on how much longer people are staying well. Tony

*I've been positive for 20 years and have decided I will grow old. I've even read
an article on ageing. Margaret*

Having a low viral load does not lead to a full recovery of your immune system. You probably won't be able to get back to a perfect immune system for a while yet but if you take treatments at the right time you can have a pretty good immune system that will get you by for some years to come.

HIV is now a manageable infection and people who are HIV positive can all be cautiously optimistic that there is a better future ahead. If you believe the next big thing will be a cure then who says you can't be right! So never, ever give up!