



Ageing and HIV

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Introduction

People who have HIV are living longer and healthier lives. The HIV medications used today are very effective. They support and protect the body's immune system and help to prevent many illnesses.

People who have HIV can live as long as people who do not have HIV. However, people with HIV may develop health problems not related to HIV as well as other age-related health conditions at a younger age.

Monitoring your mental and physical health and having a healthy lifestyle can help prevent and improve the outcome of these conditions.

What we know

- A recent life expectancy study has shown that people who have HIV can live as long as their HIV negative peers. However the study found that HIV-positive people experienced these non-HIV and ageing-related health problems on average 16 years earlier than their negative peers.¹
- People with HIV have higher rates of some age-related conditions, including cardiovascular disease (heart and blood vessel), osteoporosis (bone) and some cancers. Some people experience problems with concentration, memory loss and behaviour change. This condition is known as HAND (HIV-associated neurocognitive disorders).²
- People with HIV who have a weakened immune system (low CD4 count) are more likely to become ill. People who had a high level of virus (viral load) at the time they discovered they had HIV, are more likely to develop some health problems, even if their health has since improved.³
- Factors such as age, the level of virus in the blood, genetic factors, lifestyle and health care, all have an impact on life expectancy and health. It is important to know that there are other causes for age-related health problems, not related to HIV. For example, smoking and stress can cause heart disease whether a person has HIV or not.
- Women who have HIV could be more likely to have higher rates of non-AIDS related conditions including age-related health problems than men.^{3,4}
- Changes to your lifestyle can keep you healthy and help avoid many physical and mental health problems.

What you can do to stay healthy

Healthy eating, regular exercise, relaxation, sleep and a good social life, can help you to stay well and avoid health problems.

- **Have a good relationship with your health care worker (doctor, nurse, social worker counsellor or other support worker)**

It is important that you find a health care worker you trust and can talk to. They can help you understand your medication. Talk to them if you cannot remember to take your medication or if you do not feel like taking it.

- **Attend medical appointments regularly**

Regular health checks make sure any problems are found before they become serious.

- **Stop smoking**

Talk to your health care worker about options that will work for you. You can get free professional help to make a quit attempt from the NSW Quitline on 13 7848 and the Cancer Institute NSW website: www.icanquit.com.au

¹ Marcus JL et al. Increased overall life expectancy but not comorbidity-free years for people with HIV. Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections, abstract 151, March 2020.

² <https://www.aidsmap.com/about-hiv/hiv-and-ageing-process>.

³ *ibid*.

⁴ Womack JA, Brandt CA, Justice AC. Primary care of women aging with HIV. J Midwifery Womens Health. 2015;60(2):146-225. doi:10.1111/jmwh.12236.

⁵ Huaman MA, Fichtenbaum CJ. Bearing the Burden of Non-AIDS Comorbidities: This is What Women Aging with HIV Look Like. Clin Infect Dis. 2020 Mar 2:ciaa209. doi: 10.1093/cid/ciaa209. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 32115629.

- **Limit your intake of drugs and alcohol**

Ask your health care worker about services that can support you.

- **Include exercise in your day**

Even a short walk every day is good for you. Do what you enjoy, and exercise with other people if you need support to have regular exercise.

- **Eat a healthy, balanced diet**

Try to have vegetables and protein (meat, fish, chicken, beans, lentils, eggs, cheese and yoghurt) in most of your meals and avoid sugar (soft drink, cake, sweets). It is important to have water regularly during the day.

If you are aged 60 years or over (over 45 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) you can enrol in a free online healthy lifestyle program: *Healthy and Active for Life*: Register at www.activeandhealthy.nsw.gov.au OR for free motivational health coaching contact the *NSW Get Healthy* telephone coaching service by registering at www.gethealthynsw.com.au or calling on 1300 806 258. This is available for anyone in NSW aged over 16 years. Both programs can help you to increase your physical activity and reach your healthy eating goals.

- **Get plenty of sleep and relaxation**

Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Regular sleep helps the body to repair itself and supports good mental health and the immune system.

- **Keep your brain active**

Try puzzles, quizzes, reading, learning a new skill or anything else you enjoy.

- **Stay socially active**

See your friends or family, get involved in activities, join a club, or volunteer for a local service. You can keep in touch in person, by phone or social media. There are groups available for people who have HIV. Your health care worker can tell you about these.

- **The importance of support services**

Becoming older can be extra challenging for people with HIV. It is important for older people with HIV to use support services that are available. You may need some support in your home, for a short time or longer time or you may need residential support (nursing home). The aged care system can be quite difficult to use. A friend, or support person from a service can help you find the right support for you.

To stay healthy for longer and to be more in control of what happens to you as you get older:

- **keep taking your medications**
- **talk to your health care worker about any physical or mental health problems**
- **use support services that are available**
- **eat well, exercise, do not smoke and drink less alcohol**

Useful Contacts:

Pozhet (Heterosexual HIV Service)

Support, information, referrals and events for heterosexuals living with or at risk of HIV

Phone: 1800 812 404

Website: www.pozhet.org.au

Email: pozhet@pozhet.org.au

Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service

Information and support for individuals and communities from culturally diverse backgrounds

Phone: 1800 108 098

Website: www.mhahs.org.au

Email: info@mhahs.org.au

Positive Life NSW

A community-based organisation for people with HIV

Phone: 1800 245 677

Website: www.positivelife.org.au

Email: contact@positivelife.org.au

ADAHPS

Provides assessment, support, and referral service for people living with HIV and complex needs

Phone: 9382 8600

Website: www.health.nsw.gov.au/adahps

Email: adahps@health.nsw.gov.au

My Aged Care

Website: www.myagedcare.gov.au

TIS National Translating and Interpreting Service

Provides access to phone and on-site interpreting services in over 150 languages

Phone: 13 14 50

Website: www.tisnational.gov.au/

Email: tis.prebook@homeaffairs.gov.au

Resources

Positive Life NSW Ageing Support [brochure](#)

Positive Life NSW Resource [HIV Associated Neurocognitive Disorder \(HAND\)](#)