

Living with HIV

What is it?

Living with HIV is the term used to describe people who are HIV-positive. Over the last three decades, there's been a lot of progress in the way HIV is managed and treated.

With proper treatment, it's now possible to live 'well' with HIV and reduce the risk of spreading HIV to others. HIV treatments are medications known as antiretroviral therapy (ART).

ART can't 'cure' HIV. But, it can reduce the amount of HIV cells in the body to the point where the virus is undetectable. This means the risk of spreading HIV is low.

ART is most effective when you take it as soon as possible after testing positive. Your GP can help you learn more about HIV treatments.

What will my GP do now?

When you're first diagnosed with HIV, it can be hard to take everything in at once.

You may need to see your GP several times in the space of a few weeks to make sure you understand everything and have all your questions answered.

Your GP will:

- Refer you for an initial review with an HIV specialist
- Discuss your legal duties about telling your previous and future sexual partners
- Discuss risky behaviours to avoid – now, and in future
- Discuss right to privacy
- Give you support groups to help you cope and connect with others

What will my GP do in the future?

In future, your GP's main role is to help you live well with HIV. Your GP will provide specialty care for your HIV status as well as regular care for your ongoing health and wellbeing.

As your primary carer, your GP will also:

- Test your 'viral load' regularly
- Modify your treatment based on your test results
- Help you learn how to take your medications
- Review any existing medications and check for drug interactions and side effects
- Take other tests as necessary, including regular cancer screening
- Maintain your vaccinations
- Monitor your overall health and wellbeing
- Give you support and resources to cope
- Refer you to a specialist if you have a complex health issue

Taking Precautions

You are legally required to avoid infecting other people

You are not able to donate blood and you must tell a sexual partner about your HIV status before having sex



Practise safe sex and encourage current or future partners to use PrEP, a medication that helps to prevent infection



If you inject drugs, avoid sharing needles and dispose of used needles safely



What questions should I ask my doctor?

- How will I know if my treatment is working well?*
- How often do I take my medication?*
- What do I do if I get sick?*
- What should I change in my day-to-day life?*
- What risks do I need to be aware of?*
- Can I still exercise?*
- How can I prevent spreading the disease?*
- Who do I need to tell?*
- How often do I need to see you?*
- Who do I call if I have a question?*

What can I do?

Take time to adjust to your diagnosis. Learn about your condition and seek out HIV community groups. There are plenty of local supports and online groups to help you cope and learn more about living with HIV.

Be honest with your GP about your concerns, symptoms and any drug or alcohol use.

Take your medications as instructed, and always ask your GP if you're unsure of anything. Be aware of strategies to reduce the risk of spreading HIV to others.

See your GP regularly for testing and monitoring. Know who to contact if you have a question between appointments. Continue to live a healthy, active lifestyle – reduce risky behaviours such as drug and alcohol use.

What supports are available?

Liverpool Sexual Health Clinic

The Liverpool Sexual Health Clinic offers PEP, private STI testing and diagnosis. As well as helping you with contact tracing, staff can help you manage and cope with your diagnosis. You can either ask your GP to refer you or contact the clinic directly.

- Address: Ground Floor, 13 Elizabeth Street, Liverpool.
- Phone: **9827 8022**

Liverpool Hospital Immunology, Allergy and HIV Clinic

The clinic provides care for people living with HIV. The care teams include a range of healthcare professionals, including specialists, psychiatrists, nurses, social workers and dietitians. Phone **8738 8271**

Where can I learn more?

If you'd like to learn more about HIV exposure, the following resources can help:

- **AIDS Council of NSW (ACON) – Genesis: workshops for men newly diagnosed with HIV:** acon.org.au
- **Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations – Next steps:** hivnextsteps.org.au
- **HealthDirect Australia – HIV infection and AIDS:** healthdirect.gov.au
- **Health Translations – HIV: an introduction (multilingual resources):** healthtranslations.vic.gov.au
- **National Association of People with HIV Australia:** napwha.org.au
- **NSW STI Programs Unit – HIV and AIDS:** stipu.nsw.gov.au