

Women and AIDS : plain speaking about AIDS and how it affects women, written for women by the experts - women. 2, Positive result? - Look after yourself / Positively Women and Immunity.

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Updated
SECOND EDITION

POSITIVELY WOMEN

A N D

Immunity

Women

A N D

AIDS

*Plain speaking
about AIDS and
how it affects
women, written for
women by the
experts – women*

2. Positive result?
– Look after
Yourself

Positive result?

If you've had a positive result from an HIV antibody test, it doesn't necessarily mean you'll develop AIDS.

According to Dr Luc Montagnier, who first identified HIV, "AIDS does not inevitably lead to death, especially if you suppress the co-factors which support the disease. It's very important to tell this to people who are infected.

"Psychological factors are critical in supporting immune function. If you suppress this psychological support by telling someone they are condemned to die, your words alone will have condemned them.

"It simply isn't true that the virus is 100 percent fatal. If you lead a normal life, sleep regularly at night, avoid alcohol, coffee and tobacco, your immune system could resist the disease."

So it's vital to work on your strategy for staying well, and we mean work. In the past you've taken chances with your health.

But from now on you're looking after your best friend – yourself.

First make sure you get advice and counselling. Usually you'll get counselling from the health adviser at the clinic where you had your test. Call Positively Women immediately – see the listings, for our number.

Examine your lifestyle very carefully – be honest with yourself. Make sure you get the basics right: sleep well, eat well, live as free of stress as possible and avoid anything that you know is bad for your body. Pamper yourself, learn self-respect.

Dental Care

It's very important to have good dental care. If you are HIV positive or have AIDS, oral infections can become a problem. Ask at your clinic or see our listings for a dentist you can be honest with.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Doctors have known for years that worry, stress and depression suppress the immune system.

As Dr Goodkin, of the University of Texas Medical Center in Dallas, puts it: "There is strong evidence that psychological factors might bring on the development of the related complex of illness associated with AIDS; and positive thinking, social support and stress reduction could avoid doing so."

Positively Women recommends a strategy for learning self-respect.

Never feel guilty or ashamed about being antibody positive to HIV. It's just a medical condition – not a moral issue.

It may sound silly, but the first thing to do is to look at yourself in the mirror and tell yourself you're looking great. Look yourself straight in the eyes and say: "I love you".

Every time you have a negative thought, blitz it by thinking: "I am a unique and wonderful person. I am worthy of love" – or something like that. Keep saying this to yourself until the negative thought has disappeared completely.

When you go to bed at night, don't count sheep. Just keep repeating the phrase you've chosen to say to get rid of negative thoughts.

No matter what you hear or read on HIV and AIDS and the complexes associated with AIDS, there's absolutely no proof that you will definitely fall ill or die. Most people are very badly informed and they're almost certainly talking rubbish.

Laughter is essential. It gets rid of stress and boosts the immune system. Try to see the funny side of everything and watch as many comedies as possible.

STRATEGY FOR STAYING HEALTHY

Eat well. Positively Women recommends you cut out red meat. The antibiotics farmers give animals can make you resistant to those drugs when your doctor wants to use them to clear up any infections you may catch.

Gonorrhoea, meningitis, enteric fever and enteritis are just a few of the organisms which can become immune to antibiotics. Salmonella is found in some eggs and in chickens. We recommend you buy eggs only from your local health shop. Make sure they're well-cooked.

If don't want to give up fish, some of which is heavily polluted in the sea, we recommend you buy river fish, like salmon and trout.

A vegetarian diet needn't be boring. It is preferable to use organic foods only, but they can be expensive so we suggest you make sure all the food you eat is well-washed.

Fresh fruit and vegetables and beans, lentils and other pulses and grains are good for you and there are many interesting recipes using them.

Many people are allergic to dairy products. That needn't be a problem as there are a lot of substitutes on the market these days. We highly recommend you eat as much live yogurt as possible – look for the word 'live' on the label. It can control candida (thrush). In fact, if you suffer from vaginal thrush, you can soak a tampon in live yogurt and insert it. It has been known to work very well. Make sure you avoid too much sugar and yeast as thrush thrives on them.

Whatever you do, remember you're not alone. There are a lot of us. And we're here to support you.

STEER CLEAR OF STRESS

Reduce stress in a practical manner. Make a list of everything – and everyone – causing you stress and steer clear of them. If you can't, change your attitude to one of assertion. Before you confront them repeat the phrase you chose to say to counteract negative thoughts. If there's a mirror handy, look yourself in the eyes and tell yourself there's no way they'll get you down because you love yourself.

A great way to relieve stress is to masturbate. It's a very good way of loving yourself – and it's safe!

Many of us have been conditioned to think that loving yourself is vanity – but if you don't, who will?

PATIENT'S ORDERS

Make sure you have a good, honest relationship with your doctor. Never be afraid to ask questions. If you're not satisfied that you've been fully informed on all aspects of your state of health, change your doctor to one you're comfortable with. Don't be a passive patient. It's your health and your right to know.

NATURAL HEALTH

Honey is a natural killer of bacteria. If you've got a sore throat it's far better to take a teaspoon of honey every half hour than to take antibiotics – it's better to leave those powerful drugs for when you really need them. If your throat doesn't clear up, see your doctor. Honey containing propolis put on herpes lesions has been known to clear them up.

Try to avoid drinking tap water. It contains elements which can suppress your immune system – fluoride, for example. Buy a water filtering jug or drink bottled mineral water.

If you can afford it, it's useful to take vitamin and mineral supplements. Positively Healthy does a range of vitamins and minerals which come in convenient packs. It also produces a monthly magazine, Positively Healthy News, which contains information on staying healthy – see our listings for the address to write to for details.

There are some minerals and vitamins which are known to help the immune system, so shop around carefully as prices differ wildly. Make sure you take a brand which contains no artificial buffers. Some multi-vitamins may be a waste of money.

We feel the following are the most important: Vitamin C 1-3 grams daily, Beta Carotene (Pro Vitamin A, taken as Beta Carotene, the body will store only as much Vitamin A as it needs) 8000ius, Vitamin E 200ius, Zinc 50mg, Selenium 50mcg, multi-vitamin B – make sure they contain all the B vitamins, especially B12.

If you are on AZT – also called zidovudine or Retrovir – it might be an idea to take some extra iron supplements, as AZT has been said to cause anaemia in some women.

Call Positively Women for more information.

When you cook your food, grill or steam it. These are the best ways of keeping the good properties in your food. And never overcook vegetables, because that kills off all the nutritional properties they ever had.

Exercise is good for you and, through Positively Women, you can have free aromatherapy massages.

Get Practical

There's no point in just thinking about staying healthy – take steps to make sure you do.

Have very regular smear tests. One every six months is a good idea.

Once you've had a positive HIV antibody test result you're very vulnerable to gynaecological infections, like the wart virus, which can lead to cervical cancer.

Make sure the man you have sex with always wears a condom. To protect you as well as him.

Travel abroad

Try to get at least one holiday a year. If you're travelling to a country which requires vaccinations, do not have any live vaccines – discuss this with your doctor.

Avoid taking the sun too much – even if you want a tan. The sun can be very bad for you. It can activate herpes, for example.

Before you decide to travel to another country, check what its policy is towards HIV infection and AIDS. If you fell ill in a country which was hostile towards HIV and AIDS, you could find yourself in trouble – and, quite frankly, you can do without that sort of stress. If you are going to the USA, you will be refused entry to the country if you say you are antibody positive to HIV.

If you are travelling with medication – AZT, for example – and it's found, you will be deported. Keep that in mind and call us at Positively Women for more information or contact Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad on 01-831 5333.

GROUPS AND SERVICES

Afro Caribbean Helpline Service: Black advisers offering specialised service and support on National AIDS Helpline, 0800 567 123 *Fr 6pm-10pm. Calls free*

AIDS and Housing Project: Write: 16-18 Strutton Ground, London SW1P 2HP

Body Positive: Mutual help and support group. Drop-in centre at 51b Philbeach Gardens, London SW5. Legal and welfare benefits advice sessions by Immunity's Legal Centre. Helpline: 01-373 9124 *Daily 7pm-10pm. Write: PO Box 493, London W14 0TF*

Childline: Confidential counselling for children and young adults in trouble or danger. Write: Freeport 1111, London EC4B 4BB – no stamp needed. Phone: 0800 1111 – calls free. *24 hrs*

CLASH (Central London Action on Street Health): Young people's advice and support on anything to do with health. Write: c/o Soho Hospital, Soho Square, London W1. Phone: 01-734 1794 *Mo-Fr, 10am-5pm. Other times answering machine*

Dentists who treat people who have HIV infection: NHS Special Needs Dental Clinic, Alderney Street, London SW1. Phone: 01-630 8436 *Mo, 3pm-5pm; Tu, We, 9am-noon or advice on who to see from Mrs Satchell at City and Hackney Health Authority. Phone: 01-253 3020*

Frontliners: Mutual help and support group for people who have AIDS. Write: c/o Terrence Higgins Trust, BM AIDS, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-831 0330

Haemophilia Society: Information, advice and support for everyone who has haemophilia – and special representation of and support for people with haemophilia and infected with HIV by using Factor 8. Write: 123 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1. Phone 01-928 2020

Immunity: HIV research and health education charity with UK's only full-time specialist legal centre for anyone with a legal or benefits problem connected with HIV infection, AIDS or an associated condition. Free legal advice and court representation on offer. Also welfare rights advice. Phone to fix an appointment. Charity and legal centre at 260A Kilburn Lane, London W10 4BA. Phone 01-968 8909. *Mo-Fr 10am-5pm*

The Landmark: Day centre for people who have HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Will offer advice, recreational facilities, meals. Legal and welfare benefits advice sessions by Immunity's Legal Centre. Plus info for other people. 47 Tulse Hill, London SW2. Phone: 01-671 7611/2

Lesbian Employment Rights: Non-AIDS specialist. Good on rights at work. Write: Room 203 Southbank House, Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SJ. Phone: 01-587 1636 *Mo-Th 7pm-10pm*

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: The original helpline. Not an AIDS specialist but helpful. Write: BM Switchboard, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-837 7324. *24hrs*

London Lesbian Line: Information, support and advice for women. Phone: 01-251 6911 *Mo, Fr 2pm-10pm; Tu, Th 7pm-10pm*

London Lighthouse: Hospice and drop-in centre. Offers counselling, health advice, support at home, breaks for carers and terminal care. Legal and welfare benefits advice sessions by Immunity's Legal Centre. Write: 111-117 Lancaster Road, London W11 1QT. Phone: 01-792 1200

Margaret Pyke Centre: Gynaecology centre. Also does research. Free clinic. Gives free contraceptives – including condoms. Ring for appointment before visiting. 15 Batemans Buildings, Soho Square, London W1. 01-734 9351

Mildmay Mission: Christian-run hospice for people who have AIDS. Write: Hackney Road, London E2 7NA. Phone: 01-739 2331

National AIDS Helplines: Phone – free of charge – 0800 555 777 (for free leaflets) or 0800 567 123 (for confidential advice). *24 hours a day*

Nurses Support Group: Runs helpline for health care workers who need advice and help on HIV problems. 01-708 5605. *Mo, We, 7pm-10pm*

Positively Healthy: Self-help group encourages positive approach to coping with HIV infection and AIDS. Runs life-affirming support groups and open meetings for people with HIV antibodies or AIDS. Publishes monthly magazine (send 34p SAE). Write: PO Box 71, Richmond TW9 3DJ. Phone: 01-940 5355

Positively Women: UK's sole women-only support group – meetings open only to women with positive diagnosis – and counselling (face-to-face and on the phone), advice and information. Write: 333 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8PX. Phone: 01-837 9705 *Mo-Fr 10am-5pm. Support group meets fortnightly. Th 6.30pm-8.30pm*

Positive Partners: Self-help support for anyone affected by HIV. Write: c/o 10 Rathbone Place, London W1. Phone: 01-249 6068

Proed Street Project: Research project also offers free, STD and general women's health medical and information service for prostitutes. Contact: c/o Proed Street Clinic, St Marys Hospital, London W2 1NY. Phone: 01-725 1549/6486 *Mo-Fr, 9am-5pm. Open afternoon We 1pm-5pm. Visits by appointment Tu, 10am-5pm, We, 1pm-5pm*

Rape Crisis Centre: Physical protection and emotional support. Write: PO Box 69, London WC1. Phone: 01-837 1600. *24hrs*

SCODA (Standing Conference on Drug Abuse): Information officer keeps up-to-date list of needle exchange schemes. Write: 1-4 Hatton Place, London EC1. Phone: 01-430 2341/3

Terrence Higgins Trust: Information and counselling about HIV infection and AIDS plus support groups and trained volunteers to help people with HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Write: BM AIDS, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-831 0330 (Admin only) Helpline: 01-242 1010 *Daily, 3pm-10pm*

Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information Centre: Not an AIDS specialist – helpful. Advice on all health issues affecting women, including HIV infection and AIDS. Write: 52-54 Featherstone Street, London WC1. Phone: 01-351 6332 *Mo, We, Fr 11am-5pm*

POSITIVELY WOMEN

Is an organisation run by women for women with HIV infection, AIDS – or any of the conditions associated with it. We offer the following services: support group, open only to women who have HIV infection, AIDS, or an associated condition, telephone and one-to-one counselling and consultancy services. Write to us at 333 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8PX or phone us on 01-837 9705

WHAT'S AIDS?

AIDS is short for the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. If you have AIDS your body's defence system is severely weakened. That leaves the body vulnerable to serious infections, which can kill you. That condition is called AIDS. It develops in you.

SO WHAT'S HIV?

HIV stands for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. The virus was discovered in 1983. Since then it's been called LAV and HTLV-III, but since 1986 its official name has been HIV. It may cause AIDS to develop in you. To get infected you have to let someone's body fluids – blood, semen, vaginal fluids and, possibly, breast milk – get into your blood stream. There are no known cases of infection through tears and saliva. HIV isn't like most viruses because, when you're infected it lives inside blood cells which are part of your body's defence system. As the cells divide and multiply, so does the virus. Many scientists assume that anyone with HIV infection is at risk of developing AIDS

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

It is very difficult to get infected with HIV. You can put yourself of risk of getting infected:

- By having sex with someone who has HIV infection. You can cut the risk of infection by making sure he wears a condom – and remember, the more partners you have penetrative sex with, the greater you risk of coming into contact with the virus. Anal penetration is far riskier than vaginal penetrative sex.
- By sharing needles or syringes with someone who's infected with the virus.
- By sharing sex toys, whether you're straight or lesbian.

The virus can't be transmitted by social contact – by kissing, cuddling, shaking hands, sharing cups, towels, using toilets or by any close contact that doesn't involve the exchange of body fluids.

immunity

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