

Newly diagnosed with HIV



FAST FACTS

- With the right treatment and care, you can live a long and healthy life with HIV.
- If you have been diagnosed with HIV it is important to start taking treatment as soon as possible.
- Remember, your healthcare worker can give you guidance on treatment and put you in touch with an HIV support group or a counsellor.

Finding out you have [HIV](#) can be a shock. It's likely you will have a lot of questions and you may be dealing with difficult feelings.

Remember that an HIV diagnosis doesn't have to stop you living a full and [healthy life](#). With the right [treatment](#) and care, you can expect to live just as long as someone who doesn't have HIV.

I went for a rapid test and never expected the answer to be that I was positive. I fell to the floor, cried like I was in a soap opera, and asked "who's going to raise my children?" The tester was so amazing, so helpful in talking me down from this reaction, telling me he'd known people living with HIV for 25 years and more. I latched on to those words like a life vest those first few months.

- Anonymous

Giving yourself time

Everyone reacts differently when they find out they have HIV, but common feelings include shock, anger, fear or sadness. You may have questions about how you got the virus, and questions about what will happen to you.

All of these emotions and questions are natural. Learning more about HIV will help to answer your questions. You don't have to manage on your own - having someone to talk to about your feelings can help. As well as healthcare staff, there are lots of HIV organisations, peer support groups and online forums that might provide you with support at this time.

Talking to a trusted friend or family member can also help you process your feelings. Read about [sharing your HIV-positive diagnosis](#) to get more information if you're thinking about who you want to tell or how to tell them.

You may have good days and bad days, but give yourself time to get used to the news of your diagnosis and to learn about what it means for you.

I don't really remember much about the day or the month or two following. I do remember sitting in my doctor's office as she told me I was HIV positive. I remember looking at the painting on the wall. I became instantly numb and everything became a blur.

- Jordan

Being honest with your healthcare professional

Be honest with your healthcare professional, they are not there to judge you, but help you make decisions so that they can plan and manage your care appropriately.

It's important to share information such as your sexuality as well as your alcohol and drug use history, as these factors can contribute to different risks, for example, complications with your treatment or [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).

If you have any underlying [health conditions](#) or STIs, it's important to get treated for these too. Sometimes different treatments interact with each other, so your healthcare professional needs to know what other drugs you might be taking.

Do I need to start treatment?

Current treatment for HIV is [not a cure](#), but it can keep HIV under control and this keeps your immune system strong.

The latest guidelines recommend that all people who are diagnosed with HIV should start treatment straight away.

Once you start taking treatment, you will need to take it every day for life, so it's important that you feel ready to start. Take your time to feel prepared and find out more about [starting HIV treatment](#).

I was speechless, frozen in time. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't stop crying... It has been six years and my boyfriend - now husband - has stayed by my side. He is currently negative and we have four kids together. Just because you are positive doesn't mean you have to put your life on hold. Take your meds and enjoy life. Don't sit around allowing life to pass you by.

- Mia

What happens now?

If you were [tested in an HIV clinic](#), then you may be able to have your care in the same clinic. If you were tested somewhere else, they should make a referral to a specialist HIV clinic for you.

Your clinic may also offer you counselling, or will be able to put you in touch with an HIV support group. It can help to have someone to talk to in confidence about what's happening and how you are feeling.

You are not alone. Take your time to process how you're feeling. Although finding out you have HIV is a big piece of news to come to terms with, remember that many people are living long, healthy and fulfilled lives with HIV.

"I found out I was pos when I was only 18 years old. I was in shock, so much so that I don't even remember the next couple of months...I am finally in a pretty good place in my life, with someone who loves me and wants to be with me, a good job, and just applied to school to go back to college! I finally feel like I have a purpose in life and want to continue LIVING! I hope all of you wonderful people out there never give up hope like I did for so long! NEVER GIVE UP!"

- Megan

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Sources:

[WHO \(2015\) Guideline on when to start antiretroviral therapy and on pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV](#)

[NHS Choices \(2017\) Life expectancy for people with HIV now 'near normal'](#)

Last full review: 07 November 2017

Next full review: 07 November 2020

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