

## Being young and HIV positive



### FAST FACTS

- As you get older, you'll probably want to manage your own health, care and treatment but just because you're becoming an adult doesn't mean that you're meant to 'know it all'.
- Remember, it's your choice as to when, where and how you tell people about your HIV status.
- You might benefit from joining a local support group of other young people living with HIV to share your feelings and experiences.
- Living with HIV shouldn't stop you from having fulfilling relationships and a healthy sex life when you're ready.

Whether you've only [recently found out you have HIV](#) or you've grown up knowing you have [HIV](#), being a young person [living with HIV](#) can be particularly difficult.

Your teenage years are a time of great change - your body develops during [puberty](#), and it's often very emotional. It can be an intense and exciting time, but also it can feel difficult to cope with everything.

You may be finishing school and taking exams, and you're probably thinking about your future. This is also a time when many people have their first [relationships](#).

## Taking more responsibility for your own health

Whether you were born with HIV and diagnosed at a young age, or diagnosed more recently, perhaps in your early teens, it's likely that one of your parents or a guardian has helped you to take

your [treatment](#) at the same time each day.

As you get older, you'll probably want to manage your own health, care and treatment. And eventually, your healthcare will be transferred to an adult clinic, and this can feel like a big change.

Just because you're becoming an adult doesn't mean that you're meant to 'know it all'. You'll still need support from family and friends, and you can ask your healthcare professional about any aspect of your health at any time.

There may be questions you want to talk about with them without anyone else being present, such as having sex.

Think about what you can do to remind yourself to take your treatment, and to manage your appointments. Setting an alarm is good - you could also keep your drugs in a pill box with the days of the week on it.

## Telling your friends

Making a decision about whether or not to tell your friends (also called disclosing or [sharing your diagnosis](#)) about being HIV positive is different for everyone. Some people are open about it - perhaps you've grown up with it and everyone knows, and it's not a big issue for you. For others, fear of rejection, bullying or gossip makes telling people really difficult.

Remember, it's your choice, and you don't have to tell people if you don't want to. You may decide that it's just not the right time, and that's fine.

You may find it helpful to get to know other people in the same situation. There are support groups and activities for young people living with HIV, and these can provide good opportunities to find out about how other people are coping.

If you want to tell someone, or a group of friends, then it's good to think about how you tell them. Think about how they might react, and the kind of questions they'll have. Think about when and where, so you won't be interrupted or rushed... and think about how you'll feel afterwards.

## Having relationships

You may worry that you can never have a relationship, or [sex](#), or that you won't be loved. None of these things are true - people living with HIV fall in love, have sex, have fulfilling relationships, marry, have children (without passing on HIV) - all the things that people who don't have HIV do.

When you first meet someone, it can be really exciting and it can be intense, as you get to know each other. Starting a relationship with someone who doesn't have HIV (also called a [mixed-status relationship](#)) raises questions. When should you tell them that you have HIV? How will they react? How can you have sex without passing it on? How do you explain what it means to be [undetectable](#) and about [PrEP](#)?

Deciding how and when to tell a partner involves a lot of the same thinking as telling a friend, and more. For example, they may want to know details that you're not ready to talk about such as who your previous sexual partners have been and what you did with them.

Remember that it's your choice how much to tell them and when. You may want to avoid having a conversation, but bear in mind that the longer you put it off, the more upset they may be that you didn't tell them sooner.

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It's not that bad and there are times when you forget you have HIV. Eventually, even when you remember you're positive, it's no longer an issue.

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- A few words from someone who has been living with HIV for nearly 20 years

## Having sex

If you're going to have sex, using external (or [male](#)) condoms or internal (or [female](#)) condoms correctly is a very effective way of preventing HIV, [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) and unplanned pregnancy.

Many clinics provide free condoms and other contraception, as well as confidential information and advice. There are other ways of preventing unplanned pregnancy, including the contraceptive pill, implant and injection (for women).

If you're taking HIV treatment and it's keeping the level of HIV in your body (viral load) very low, the risk of passing it on is much lower. If you're [undetectable](#) you're untransmittable.

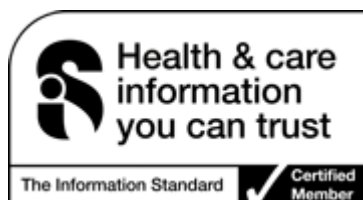
It's important to tell your healthcare professional if you're taking HIV treatment and contraceptive drugs together, as some antiretrovirals interact with them and make the contraception less effective.

## Sharing responsibility for safer sex

Talk to your partner before you have sex so that you can share the responsibility for [having safer sex](#). If your partner knows about HIV, it can make it easier to talk about using condoms.

Having HIV shouldn't stop you from having great sex - you have just as much right to a fulfilling and healthy sex life a person who doesn't have HIV - but don't feel that you [have to have sex](#) just because your partner wants to. It's up to you to decide when you're [ready for sex](#) - it's your choice and no one else's.

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### Sources:

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Brook (2015) 'HIV' (Accessed June 2018)

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