

A photograph of two men in a kitchen. The man on the left is wearing a light grey t-shirt and has his arms around the man on the right. The man on the right is wearing a plaid shirt and is smiling. They are both looking down and appear to be in a close, affectionate embrace. The background shows a kitchen with a window and a yellow lamp.

HIV/AIDS

What you
need to know

If you or someone you care about has been diagnosed with HIV, you probably have many questions. We hope to answer most of them.





Understanding HIV/AIDS

We've prepared this guide to help you better understand HIV: why and how it occurs, what the treatment options are, and how to live your life to the fullest despite the challenges HIV brings.

What is HIV?

- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that spreads from person to person through body fluids. The virus attacks your body's natural defence system (the immune system).

How does someone get HIV?

- People are most often infected with HIV through sexual intercourse or through shared intranasal or injectable drug use with shared equipment (needles, syringes, straws, drug preparation equipment). HIV can also be passed from a mother to a child during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

How does HIV become AIDS?

- If left untreated, HIV weakens the person's immune system to the point that it can no longer fight off serious infections. The risk of certain types of cancer can also increase. When a person becomes sick with these infections and/or these types of cancer, they are said to have "acquired immunodeficiency syndrome" or AIDS.

Is there a cure for HIV?

- There is currently no cure for HIV, but medication can control the virus. Anti-HIV medication allows a person living with HIV to enjoy a long and healthy life—in many cases, as long as someone who doesn't live with HIV. If medication is taken properly, it also lessens the risks of passing the virus along to others.



Exploring your options: Treating HIV/AIDS

How is HIV treated?

Everyone living with HIV should receive treatment to keep the amount of the HIV virus in their body (known as “viral load”) as low as possible. Treatment usually includes a combination of several anti-HIV or “antiretroviral” drugs often referred to as ARVs. These drugs prevent the virus from reproducing itself inside your body. If you take your anti-HIV medicines as prescribed, it lowers your risk of becoming sick or passing on HIV.

What happens if I forget to take my medication?

It’s extremely important to take your medication exactly as prescribed by your doctor. If you forget to take your medication, take it as soon as you remember, then continue according to your usual schedule. Ask your pharmacist about compliance blister packs, a medication packaging system that can reduce the risk of forgetting your pills.

If you don’t take anti-HIV medicine properly, your HIV infection may become resistant to the drugs, and the amount of the virus in your body (the viral load) will begin to rise again. This could cause potential damage to your vital organs—such as kidneys, heart or brain—by the process of inflammation. If your viral load becomes detectable, you also risk passing your HIV infection along to any sexual partners.

What about other medications I take—will the anti-HIV drugs affect them?

Speak with your doctor or pharmacist about every medication you’re taking—even over-the-counter pills and health products.

Once you start taking anti-HIV medication, be sure to speak with your doctor or your pharmacist before starting any new medications, prescription or otherwise.

If you use illicit drugs, some may interact with your anti-HIV medication. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about them.

Are generic anti-HIV drugs just as effective as the brand-name ones?

Yes.

Generic drugs in Canada are tested to ensure they deliver the same active ingredient, in the same dose and for the same length of time as their brand-name equivalents.



The important thing is to make sure you don't get isolated, especially in the first few weeks after your diagnosis.





Your personal life

What about my partner—are they now at risk of getting HIV, too?

Your sexual partner is at risk of getting HIV. Follow these tips to help prevent spreading the virus:

- If you don't have a steady partner, always use a condom, even if your viral load is undetectable. You don't want to contract a resistant strain of HIV or other sexually transmitted infection (STI), such as syphilis or hepatitis C, which might impact your immune system.
- If you are in a long-term relationship, make sure your partner is not at risk of getting HIV. First, make sure you get treated. If you take your HIV medication exactly as directed and have regular follow-ups with your doctor, your viral load will become undetectable within six months of initiating the anti-HIV treatment. Once your viral load is undetectable, if you continue taking your treatment and you don't have or acquire any other STI, you are very unlikely to transmit the virus to anyone. The key is not to forget your anti-HIV pills and not to get any other STI.
- If you're in a long-term relationship with an HIV-negative partner and you are in the first six months of treatment, your partner can benefit from pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP. PrEP is a treatment in which your HIV-negative partner takes a very specific anti-HIV medication proven to lower the risk of acquiring HIV from you. In clinical trials, PrEP was shown to be more than 90 percent effective in reducing the risk of acquiring HIV when used consistently. PrEP would only be indicated for your partner until you become undetectable and stay undetectable for at least six months with no other STI.

What if I'm pregnant—will my baby have HIV as well?

- If you're pregnant, or planning a pregnancy, know that HIV can be transmitted during pregnancy or breastfeeding. However, if you take your medication correctly, you can avoid passing the virus along to your baby—by some estimates, you can reduce the chance by 99 percent.

I feel like I should tell my family and friends, but I'm not sure—should I?

- Many people are worried about whether or not to tell others about an HIV diagnosis. If you're newly diagnosed, you don't have to tell everyone immediately. Start with your partner, who needs to know. You may also want to talk with a close friend or family member.
- If you don't feel comfortable speaking with people you're close to, you may prefer to speak with a healthcare professional or join a support group.
- The important thing is to make sure you don't get isolated, especially in the first few weeks after your diagnosis.



How to support someone living with HIV/AIDS

Whether you're caring for a partner, family member or friend with HIV, there are a few things you can do to help them.

- Listen. An HIV diagnosis can feel like the world has been turned upside-down. Listen to their concerns and fears, as well as their hopes for the future.
- Educate yourself. If your partner has been diagnosed, you will need to take extra precautions to avoid getting HIV.
- Remember that they are the same person as before the diagnosis. They will still enjoy the same activities and should eventually expect to have the same hopes for the future. Your life together can get back to virtually normal, especially if the person follows the treatment plan.
- Help them take their medication as directed. This will ensure that HIV has a minimal impact on your lives.

Take care of yourself

- If your sexual partner has been diagnosed with HIV, you also need to get tested. If you test negative, talk to your doctor about ways to prevent exposure.
- Until your partner's viral load has become undetectable, be careful to avoid any exposure to the virus—apart from sexual transmission, you also need to avoid sharing items like toothbrushes, razors, etc. Also, handle any exposed items with gloves.
- Get support if you need it. Sometimes you may need to talk about your own fears and concerns, and a support group can be very helpful in expressing your feelings without feeling guilty.
- Keep healthy. Taking care of your own health will ensure you can be the best support possible for your partner/family member when they need you.

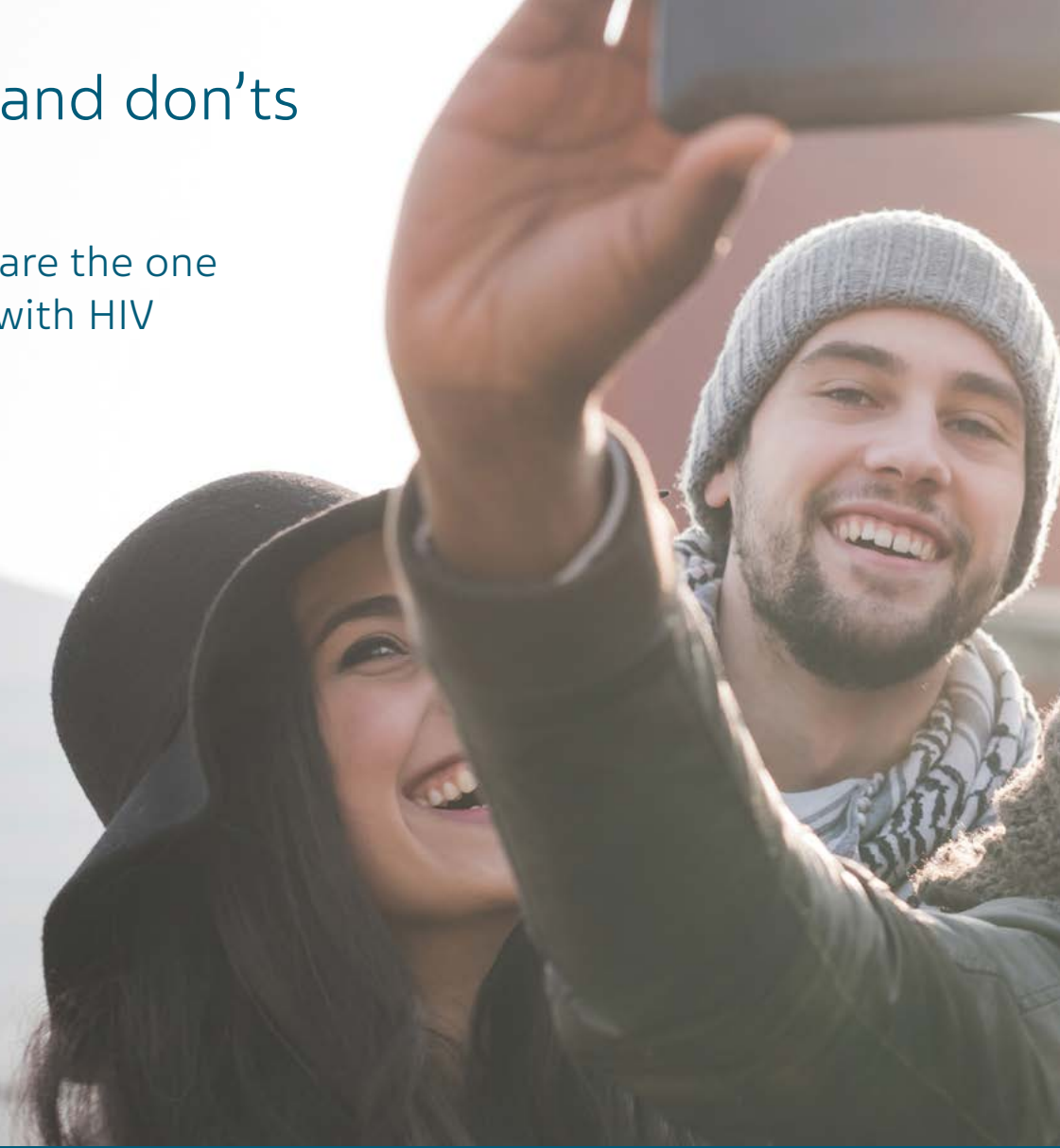
Visit [TevaCanada.com/Caregivers](https://www.TevaCanada.com/Caregivers) for more resources and support.



Get support if you need it. Sometimes you may need to talk about your own fears and concerns.

Dos and don'ts

If you are the one
living with HIV



Do

Take your HIV treatment regularly as prescribed.



Do

Keep healthy: lower your alcohol consumption, exercise regularly, keep a healthy and balanced diet and be sure to maintain good sleep hygiene.



Do

Use a condom every time you have sexual intercourse—for your protection and the protection of others.



Do

Get support if you need it.



Don't

Don't despair: if you take your medication as prescribed, HIV will have a minimal effect on your life.



Don't

Don't get isolated, especially in the first few weeks after your diagnosis.



Don't

Don't start any new medications without speaking with your pharmacist.



Don't

Don't have unprotected sex: it could place you at risk of getting a resistant strain of HIV, which could cause your antiretroviral treatment to fail.



Don't

Don't smoke or do illicit drugs.

Dos and don'ts

If you are the partner of a person living with HIV





Do

Allow yourself to fall in love with a person living with HIV. They are no different from you; if they are compliant with their treatment, they are not contagious.



Do

Educate yourself on HIV and other STIs.



Do

Ask if your partner has always had an undetectable viral load since starting the antiretroviral treatment.



Do

Talk with your partner about their compliance with treatment, including regular follow-up visits with their doctor (at least two per year is recommended). Offer to meet with your partner's doctor to talk about HIV and your partner's treatment, and ask if the doctor would also take you as a patient for regular follow-up and annual screening. Offer your partner compliance blister packs (a medication packaging system that makes it harder to forget their medication). Verify the compliance packs occasionally to make sure that your partner does not forget the pills.



Don't

Don't be afraid of HIV. It is a chronic condition, like diabetes. It's not transmitted by kissing, touching, sharing the same utensils or sharing the same toilets.



Don't

Don't talk about your partner's HIV status with others without their consent.



Don't

Don't have unprotected sex if your partner is in the first six months of anti-HIV treatment or is not compliant with their treatment. Don't have sex with others. If you do, always use protection for oral, anal and vaginal sex to reduce the risk of other STIs. Other STIs might make your partner's immune system fragile and their viral load detectable.



Don't

Don't share razors, toothbrushes or other personal items exposed directly to body fluids.



Don't

Don't do drugs or abuse alcohol. These might make you put yourself in risky situations.



Living better days

Advice from patients diagnosed with HIV

“The good thing that came out of it is that I’m more careful in terms of my health. I considered myself to be a relatively healthy person; now, I feel that I have to be more careful, and, in the end, being more careful is not such a bad thing.”

“The moment I got the diagnosis, my heart fell, I started to cry. But there are many very good drugs out there. Now that I’m undetectable, there’s nothing to worry about. It’s not like it used to be; things have changed a lot.”

“I was afraid of rejection in relationships; it had happened before: I was very honest with whoever I met, and sometimes it worked out and sometimes it didn’t. I would encourage anyone who’s an HIV-negative partner of a person who’s positive to be honest about their fears. To put the cards on the table and really discuss things.”

Advice from partners and caregivers

“We eventually realized that this is more like a chronic illness, like diabetes. Once the illness is undetectable, and monitored every six months like this, there’s no difficulty whatsoever. You just need to follow the treatment faithfully. We live well. We take care of ourselves, like everybody should.”

“We went on a few dates, and he told me that he was HIV-positive. I felt really sad, because I really liked him. I backed away and was thinking of not contacting him again, because I’ve always taken care of myself, and I didn’t really want to date someone who was HIV-positive. But then I did some research about HIV. And we continued dating. I’ve actually met his doctor, too. I haven’t really been able to completely forget that the disease is there, but after talking to the doctor and knowing more about the treatment that he takes, I’ve been more reassured.”

“I think that being more open and talking about it would really help people understand that you can be HIV-positive and, when you’re taking the treatment, you can live a normal life like anybody else.”

For more stories from patients and caregivers,
visit [TevaCanada.com/Caregivers](https://www.tevacanada.com/caregivers).



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We are committed to working with our pharmacy partners to help make the care journey easier for you.

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