



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**NSW Ministry of Health**

**Dr Katherine Brown (Director Illawarra Sexual Health Service, Senior Staff Specialist and Clinical Associate Professor University of Sydney and University of Wollongong)**

**Dr. Chris Bourne (Head, NSW STI Programs Unit; Senior Staff Specialist, Sydney Sexual Health Centre SESLHD; and Conjoint Associate Professor, Kirby Institute UNSW)**

**NSW Sexually Transmitted Infections Programs Unit**

**The Australasian Society for HIV Medicine**

**Positive Life NSW**

**ACON Staff**



**[START]**

**This booklet contains information that is relevant to dealing with a new diagnosis.**

**All the answers won't be here, but this booklet will give you some basics on HIV, together with information about what to expect over the next few months.**

**It also includes advice about a range of services that may help you adjust to managing HIV within your day to day life.**

If you've recently tested positive for HIV, chances are you'll be experiencing a range of emotions.

There's no denying receiving a positive test result can be a pretty shattering experience, but it stopped being a life-stopping experience a long time ago. The important thing is that you can manage HIV - you will adapt to HIV and live your life the way you choose to live it.

The first thing is to allow yourself some time to work through your initial feelings and reactions, secure in the knowledge that living with HIV today is nothing like it was in the 80s and early 90s. There will be challenges, but it is important to know that help is available if you want it - no-one has to deal with HIV alone.

This booklet has been written by gay men living with HIV, who have been in the same place as you are now. We have gone through the range of emotions that you're probably feeling right now.

*'When I was given my positive diagnosis, it was like getting the wind knocked out of me.'*

*'For two or three days I couldn't eat or talk to anyone. It took almost a week for me to experience even a moment where I wasn't thinking about the fact I was positive.'*

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## HIV TODAY

*In Australia, there is a diverse range of people living with HIV.*

*The reality of what life is like with HIV is different to years gone by. People are living well, living longer and managing HIV within their lives.*



## HIV IS CHANGING

The arrival of effective HIV combination therapy in the mid-90s changed everything for most of us. Continuous improvement since then has resulted in treatments that are more effective in suppressing HIV, are easier to take and less likely to cause side effects. The majority of people now take treatment - most with as little as one or two pills a day.

Having HIV does present challenges. The impact can be different from person to person, but for most of us the reality is that HIV is a chronic manageable disease. You can live a pretty normal life for the most part, but ongoing wellness is ultimately going to be dependent on HIV treatment.

It's also the reality that most men are leading rewarding and healthy lives with HIV. Taking charge of your health, being informed about treatments, and connecting to a variety of support options/services are ways that gay men have been able to do this.

**More info:** [www.yourbodyblueprint.org.au](http://www.yourbodyblueprint.org.au)

## YOU CAN CONNECT

*There's a range of services available to you through organisations such as ACON that can link you in with peer support, workshops or counselling.*

*Resources are also available online if you are not ready to connect in person or by talking.*

## GENESIS

Genesis is a partnership between ACON\* and Positive Life NSW\*\* that delivers a non-residential weekend workshop for gay men recently diagnosed with HIV.

Genesis is peer-led and presented, which means it is run by and for gay men living with HIV. The aim is to give you the confidence and the capacity to manage HIV within the life you choose to live.

Genesis provides practical advice, information and a peer perspective on a wide range of issues that you may confront after diagnosis. There's also time set aside for sharing personal experiences, problems and possible solutions with the support and encouragement of other gay men who, like you, are experiencing or have been through a diagnosis.

\*ACON is New South Wales' leading health promotion organisation specialising in HIV and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) health

\*\* Positive Life NSW works to promote a positive image of people living with and affected by HIV with the aim of eliminating prejudice, isolation, stigmatisation and discrimination.

*'I needed to get information. I had worked out that I wanted to be in control of the situation and my health. So I am glad I turned up to the weekend.'*

*'Genesis liberated a lot of what I was scared about or had questions about, the rest was up to me to figure out.'*

*'By the end of the weekend, I was on a bit of a post-workshop high and was feeling so much better about the road ahead.'*

## NEWLY DIAGNOSED COUNSELLING

ACON provides counselling for support and information for people recently diagnosed or affected with HIV diagnoses including partners, family and friends. Counselling offers a safe place to discuss the needs and feelings associated with a recent diagnosis and links to services. Follow up is provided within one working day and can be offered through face-to-face contact or by phone.

## ONE TO ONE PEER SUPPORT

ACON and Positive Life NSW also offers support from HIV positive peers who work with positive gay men. Peers are able to provide one-to-one support to those men who may want to talk to someone who understands, but who may not necessarily want to speak to a counsellor.

## ONLINE

There is a wealth of information online and sometimes sorting through this can be a daunting experience. Check out the Newly Diagnosed section on Ending HIV for useful links to websites and other services.

**More info:** [endinghiv.org.au/nsw/support-for-diagnosed](http://endinghiv.org.au/nsw/support-for-diagnosed)

## HIV - THE BASICS

*Knowing the basics about HIV is important and can empower you to make decisions about your health, your sex life and your general wellbeing.*

*There is a lot of information out there, so understanding the basics is always a good place to start.*

## WHAT IS HIV?

'HIV' stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV targets the immune system - the body's defence against infection. HIV reproduces in the body and without treatment will in just about every case gradually weaken the immune system to the point that the body can no longer mount an effective response to infections that can lead to more serious disease.

## WHAT IS AIDS?

'AIDS' stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and describes the cumulative effect of the combination of potentially life-threatening infections and cancers, which can develop when someone's immune system has been significantly weakened by HIV. In most cases, left untreated, these illnesses will eventually overwhelm the individual and result in death. You can't "catch" AIDS and there is no AIDS test. HIV causes AIDS and it is HIV that can be passed on.

## WHY LOOKING AFTER YOUR HEALTH MEANS YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT AIDS

In Australia today, AIDS is increasingly rare. Current HIV treatments, when taken as prescribed, are highly effective at suppressing HIV to the point where progression to AIDS becomes extremely unlikely. We'll talk more about treatments later on in this booklet.



## MYTHS AND FACTS

*Getting hold of accurate and up-to-date information is the first step towards taking control of HIV.*

*Fortunately, there are many people around to answer your questions. Knowledge is power - once you know more about living with HIV you'll be in a better place to deal with it.*

## MYTH #1

*'This is the end of my life.'*

HIV is NOT a death sentence. Treatment has come a long way since combination therapy first became available in the 1990s. The number of pills required daily has significantly reduced and treatment has become more effective and easier to take. Before these improvements some people used to experience high levels of toxicity and severe side effects but this is now much less likely to be the case. Most people diagnosed with HIV today can expect to live active and satisfying lives into old age, because of the advances in treatment.

Getting the right information and being able to talk to people who have been through the same experience can be a really important part of that process.

## MYTH #2

*'I am afraid of infecting my partner.'*

Being HIV positive does not necessarily mean that you are going to infect your partner/s. You and your partner/s can have a fulfilling sex life, and you can help to ensure that he stays HIV negative. Using condoms is a very effective way of preventing HIV transmission during sex.

Additionally, being on effective treatment with an undetectable viral load (see page 29 for more information on undetectable viral load), for at least 6 months, makes HIV transmission much less likely. This is also now known as 'Treatment as Prevention' as it is one way of reducing the risk of transmission. Treatment can also contribute to fewer HIV related symptoms and fewer illnesses that would occur because of a weakened immune system. There is more information in the 'Staying Safe' section on page 27 about how to prevent sexual transmission, which includes new technologies like PrEP. It is important to note that today the person most likely to pass on HIV is someone who doesn't know they have it.

## MYTH #3

*'I've discovered this rash on my body.  
Is this because something terrible is happening  
because of the virus?'*

Chances are, probably not. It is quite normal to become much more vigilant about your health and notice things about your body that you might not have noticed previously.

This happens to many people who are living with a range of different health issues, and is a normal response to a new diagnosis. Rashes and other flu-like symptoms can happen to some people during the seroconversion period (the process of changing from being HIV negative to being HIV positive after exposure to HIV, which usually lasts less than month). These symptoms are rarely serious and do not happen to everyone.

If you are worried about a rash or any other symptoms speak to your doctor or other HIV health clinician who will be able to check that everything is ok.

## MYTH #4

*'My sex life is over.'*

After receiving a positive diagnosis, for some it is very normal for sex to be the furthest thing from their mind. For others, receiving a positive diagnosis has no impact of their sex lives at all. Both of these responses are ok and normal. Some people may find it difficult disclosing their HIV status to a potential sex partner. Disclosing your status is not easy at first. It is important to find a way of disclosing that makes you feel comfortable, and gives you the confidence to handle an unwanted response. This can take a little while to work out. Making contact with a peer-based organisation (see the back of this booklet) and speaking to someone who has gone through the same thing could help you to find ways of disclosing your status. Understanding risk of transmission and collecting enough information so you can answer questions that may be asked when you disclose is also a good way of building confidence, both for you and your potential partner.

## MYTH #5

*'My whole life as I know it is at an end.  
Everything will change!'*

HIV brings challenges, and is probably dominating your thoughts right now, but it is only one aspect of your life. As time progresses you will see that it will probably only have a limited place in your day-to-day life. People with HIV continue to have careers, families, friends, relationships and to lead ordinary lives.

## MYTH #6

*'There are terrible side effects from HIV treatment.'*

Improvements in treatment have meant that most HIV positive people live relatively healthy lives, with little or no side effects from medication. Advances in treatment mean most people need to take fewer pills, for some only a pill or two a day. Speaking with your doctor and peer-based organisations can give you the facts on HIV treatments today. You can find a list of contacts in the back of this booklet.

## LIVING WITH HIV

*HIV doesn't have to rule your life. For more and more people HIV is a manageable part of their day to day life.*

*You will have to make choices to manage HIV, but know that there is a variety of support out there so you don't have to make these choices alone.*

## WORKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Forming a good relationship with your doctor is one of the most important things that you can do for your health. Finding a doctor who works with you is crucial. It is going to be a long-term relationship and you will make some big decisions regarding your health together (primarily about treatment), so finding a doctor you can trust as well as be open and honest is important.

HIV treatments can only be prescribed by doctors who have specialist qualifications in treating HIV. These specialists are called 'Schedule 100 Prescribers', or 's100 prescribers'. HIV prescribers practice at certain hospitals, sexual health clinics and some specialised private GP practices. In some rural areas of NSW these doctors are only accessible at sexual health clinics.

However, if you already have a doctor you like and who you are comfortable with, your doctor may consider working with an S100 prescriber to manage your HIV treatment. If you see a specialist for your HIV treatment you should also have a GP for day to day issues as most health problems are not HIV related.



It is important to inform your GP about your HIV status as some HIV medications interact badly with treatment for other common conditions such as cholesterol or reflux and they will need to check before prescribing. (see page 45 of this booklet to find a list S100 prescribing doctors).

## FOLLOW UP TESTS AFTER A DIAGNOSIS OF HIV

You may have questions about the tests that your doctor will be giving you - who wouldn't?

Just remember any chronic health condition requires ongoing medical care and support. Your doctor will run some tests after diagnosis as a starting point. These provide information about your health at the time you are diagnosed. The most common of these tests are CD4 and viral load monitoring. There will be other tests your doctor will carry out; speak with your doctor about the tests being performed so you understand what they are and why they are being done.

Once you have had a couple of visits, you should only need to go for regular check-ups, probably every 3 or 4 months (or as required by your doctor). It is important to monitor your health after your diagnosis and to stay connected to good medical care.

## CD4

A CD4 cell (one of the body's T cells) is a type of white blood cell. These are key players in your immune system. When you first become HIV positive your CD4 count could decrease, sometimes dramatically. This is part of a typical immune response, and indicates that your immune system is recognising and attempting to control HIV. Your CD4 count will stabilise as your immune system settles into living with HIV. Your CD4 count throughout this time may go up and down and this is normal. This is why your levels are monitored as part of your regular blood tests.

## VIRAL LOAD

Your viral load refers to the amount of HIV in your blood. The level may range from 'undetectable' to thousands, hundreds of thousands or even millions. Results are given in terms of 'copies' per millilitre (ml) of blood. When you are first exposed to HIV, your viral load may increase to a high level. Within six months from seroconversion your viral load may reduce somewhat and stabilise. When you start HIV treatment your viral load should rapidly fall to undetectable levels (or close to it) and remain there while you continue to take your medication as prescribed. Many people experience the occasional short-term

increase (sometimes called a 'blip') when on treatments, where their viral load may become detectable. This may happen if you have missed doses of your treatment. Should this happen to you, your doctor may want to repeat your blood test a month or so later to ensure that your viral load has returned to undetectable levels.

An undetectable blood result doesn't mean you have zero or no HIV in your blood - but rather, that treatments have dramatically reduced the level of HIV in your blood to extremely low levels, detectable only by very specialised and sensitive pathology tests.

## SEXUAL HEALTH

Regular check-ups for sexually transmissible infections (STIs) should be part of your routine. When you do become sexually active again, it is important to have an STI check-up.

It is important to know if you have an STI. Some STIs can increase the HIV viral load in cum, pre-cum and anal mucus because the immune system is fighting both the HIV infection and the other STI. For an HIV positive man, an increased viral load means a greater risk to your health, and also makes passing on HIV more likely if you are having unprotected sex.

A sexual health check is easy to have. When you visit your doctor for your CD4 and Viral Load check-up, ask for a sexual health screen as well. You should have STIs tests of your urine, throat, bum /ass and blood for a complete sexual health check at least once per year. You are already at the clinic so why not get everything looked after in the same visit? It will save you a lot of time. If you do get an STI, your doctor can assist you with contact tracing your previous sexual partners

**More info:**

[www.thedramadownunder.info](http://www.thedramadownunder.info)

[www.thenewdeal.org.au](http://www.thenewdeal.org.au)

## TREATMENT

Treatments are the best way to control HIV. HIV medications or HIV Antiretrovirals (ARVs) are commonly referred to as treatments. Some people become anxious when considering treatments as they think they are becoming unwell or are concerned about side effects. Neither is necessarily true. Treatment will assist you to manage your HIV and lead a healthy long life. With the right information and support it is easy to find a combination that works for you.

Advances in HIV knowledge mean that treatments are easier to take with far fewer side effects. Most people start treatments that utilise three drugs from at least two different classes of medication, although this doesn't necessarily mean three pills as some can be combined together. This is sometimes known as your 'Combination' or 'Combination Therapy'. A wider choice of medications allows people to change their combinations if they do experience side effects, and newer combinations are much more effective against the virus, easier to take and usually require only a few pills to be taken once or twice each day.

Treatments work best when you take them correctly, that is at the right time each day. Taking your medication correctly is also called 'adherence'.

Modern treatments are also highly effective at reducing HIV in your blood to 'undetectable' levels. In addition to having great personal health benefits, having an undetectable viral load in your blood drastically reduces the risk of passing HIV onto another person during sex.

Some people will still have some HIV in their semen or other sites so it doesn't completely eliminate the risk. Accessing treatment in Australia is becoming more convenient. There are now three way you can collect HIV meds.

1. Hospital Pharmacies
2. Local Chemists
3. Online Pharmacies

For more information about picking up your treatments, speak with your doctor. Alternatively you can contact ACON or Positive Life NSW (contact details on page 42).

## **BENEFITS OF EARLY TREATMENT**

Key findings of a recent study (START study) show that early treatment of HIV extends life expectancy and prevents serious illness, including major cardiovascular events, cancer, renal and liver disease. Importantly, the interim study results confirm there is no additional risk of harm associated with early treatment as compared to delayed treatment.

International guidelines recommend that people diagnosed with HIV start treatment sooner than

previously advised, and to begin to consider it soon after the time that you're diagnosed, regardless of your CD4 count. In Australia, HIV treatment can be started when the person with HIV is ready.

Start talking about treatment with your doctor early to learn more about treatment benefits.

## LONGER LIFE EXPECTANCY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Starting treatment early will result in a higher CD4 count and a stronger immune system. It is one of the best things you can do to ensure good long-term health. Life expectancy for someone diagnosed with HIV today is similar to someone who does not have HIV, if you diligently look after your health.

Some people with HIV may experience fatigue, 'foggy' thinking, and difficulty with memory. Anxiety and sometimes depression can come with HIV: this is perfectly normal as HIV is a significant viral infection and can make you feel tired and a bit unwell. Treatment reduces these issues for most people with HIV.

## REDUCED INFLAMMATION THAT LEADS TO OTHER ILLNESSES

When the immune system detects any infection, including HIV, it commences what's known as an 'inflammatory' response. This is basically your immune system releasing chemicals that cause inflammation to help control infection. This response is helpful in the short term - for example if you have the flu. But when you have untreated HIV, these chemicals are released continuously over time. That inflammatory response continues while your HIV remains untreated and it can cause damage to the heart, liver, kidneys and brain. We are still learning a lot about how HIV affects our bodies.

HIV treatment can dramatically reduce inflammation. For other ways to reduce inflammation, discuss with your doctor.



## STAYING SAFE

*Just because you are HIV positive, doesn't mean you have to give up a fulfilling sex life.*

*There are ways that you can have a rich and full sex life and protect your sexual partners from HIV.*

*Getting the right information about risk and prevention strategies can give you the confidence you need to ensure your sex life is fun, safe and fulfilling.*

## RISK OF TRANSMISSION

HIV is transmitted by bodily fluids like semen (cum - including pre-cum, the fluid present before ejaculation), and mucus from the lining of the arse or blood passing from a person with HIV into the bloodstream of someone who doesn't have HIV.

There are a range of prevention and risk reduction strategies to brush up on to stop transmission occurring.

## PREVENTING TRANSMISSION

### CONDOMS

Condoms provide the most effective barrier to HIV and are also the best way of reducing your chances of picking up or passing on other sexually transmissible infections (STIs). Condoms can prevent infected fluids passing from one partner to the other when having sex. This makes sex using a condom and water-based or silicon-based lube safe for both partners. If used properly, condoms are extremely reliable.

## UNDETECTABLE VIRAL LOAD (UDVL)

An undetectable viral load sustained over six months or more and without the presence of STIs, greatly reduces the risk of HIV transmission. However, there is still a risk involved. In addition, an undetectable viral load does not have any effect of protecting against the transmission of other STIs.

Having a STI in your penis may raise the viral load in your semen, potentially increasing the risk of transmission. The same goes for your ass/bum. Getting an STI screen is easy and this can be done as part of your regular testing routine. If you have any STI's, it's important to get it treated.

The initial results of two studies (Opposites Attract and PARTNER) suggest that HIV positive men who are on treatment and have an undetectable viral load are highly unlikely to transmit the virus to their partners. While these results are promising and show greatly reduced transmission risk, they have not ruled out all risk of transmission. More definitive results are expected in the coming years.

## OTHER RISK REDUCTION STRATEGIES

Risk reduction strategies is a term given to a range of ways used to reduce the risk of passing on HIV.

**More info:** [www.knowtherisk.org.au](http://www.knowtherisk.org.au)

### PEP

PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis) is a course of anti-HIV medications taken over a four week period. If someone is exposed to HIV, PEP may prevent an HIV infection occurring, particularly when started soon after possible exposure. People are encouraged to start treatment as soon as possible after 'the event' but within 72 hours (three days) at the very latest.

**More info:** [1800 PEP NOW \(1800 737 669\)](tel:1800737669)

### PrEP

PrEP (pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) is a new means of reducing the risk of acquiring HIV. It involves people who are HIV negative taking antiretroviral medications. When taking PrEP the medication builds up in a person's system to the point where it is effective in breaking the replication cycle of the virus, which reduces the chance of the virus taking hold in the body.

**More info:** [www.whatisprep.org](http://www.whatisprep.org)

## DISCLOSURE

*Telling people your HIV status can be tricky. Sometimes it'll be beneficial to share this information with people like doctors and friends, and other times, you'll want to keep it private.*

*Disclosure to family and friends will be a personal choice for you.*

## SEXUAL DISCLOSURE

Disclosure to sexual partners can seem difficult, but there are things you can do to make it easier. Speaking to support services or other people with HIV can be very helpful in working out how to do it. (See back pages for a list of support services).

It is important to understand the laws around sexual disclosure in New South Wales. Having this knowledge and understanding what it means can give you confidence when having sex, and when disclosing your HIV status.

In NSW the law regarding the transmission of HIV is covered under two acts, the Public Health Act 2010 and the Crimes Act 1900.

The Public Health Act requires that a person must inform a sexual partner of their HIV status prior to sex, which includes both anal and oral sex, unless they are taking reasonable precautions against the transmission of HIV. It is important to note that 'reasonable precautions' have not yet been outlined by a court. However may include the use of condoms and lube.

## SHARING YOUR STATUS WITH OTHERS

It is understandable that you may want to tell friends and family about your HIV diagnosis. You may want their support or just someone close to talk to. When thinking about opening up to friends or family about your diagnosis consider carefully these few points before you do.

- 1 - Why are you telling them? Be sure of your motive before disclosing.
- 2 - Once it's out there, you can't take it back. Be sure that the person you are telling is someone you can trust not to share your information with others.
- 3 - Not everyone understands what HIV is like today. Some people may be misinformed and may worry about your health. You may have to provide them with some support and information when disclosing (having this booklet with you may help), which might be too much for you at this time.

If you need to 'unload' right away, perhaps just to talk things through with a willing listener, there are understanding and knowledgeable people you can talk to in strict confidence either on the phone or face-to-face. Services can be found in the back of this booklet.

### WHAT ABOUT EMPLOYERS?

It is common to have questions or concerns about disclosing your HIV status to employers. As with other disclosures it is important to think over who, what, and how you tell others, and the same principles discussed above apply. In general, people with HIV do not have to disclose their HIV status to their employer. There are very few employment situations where you are required to disclose your HIV status, the exceptions being where it is required by law or regulation and/or where there is a foreseeable risk of transmission of HIV to another person in the workplace.

**More info:** [www.halc.org.au](http://www.halc.org.au)



# ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

*An HIV diagnosis does not mean that you cannot use alcohol and other drugs; however there may be some new things for you to consider.*

Partying frequently or for long periods can make sticking to HIV treatment more complicated and can cause you to miss treatment doses. It's important to plan ahead effectively so that you continue to take your HIV treatment even if you're partying for a long time.

Some treatments make the effect of recreational drugs like ecstasy stronger than they would be normally, so if you are going to use, taking smaller amounts first to gauge the strength is advisable.

If you want to speak to someone about HIV treatments and alcohol and drug use, information is available from the alcohol and other drugs contacts at the back of this booklet. If you feel that your drinking or drug use is a problem, there are good services available that can help you make decisions about what to do. See the back pages of this booklet

## CONCLUSION

*This booklet has covered some of the basic information about HIV.*

*You may have more questions as you are just getting started. It is important to take things slowly and build your knowledge gradually.*

Hopefully this booklet has given you some practical information about being diagnosed with HIV today. It is manageable and you will get through this time. Support is out there if you need it, or if you just need more information, that is out there too. HIV has changed from years gone by, modern treatments mean that you can lead a long and full life.

The next few pages list other booklets, websites, support services and people you can talk to in confidence.

### **Remember**

- + You are not alone**
- + Modern treatments are highly effective**
- + It can be useful to talk to other people with HIV who have been where you are right now.**

## FURTHER READING

*This is a list of booklets for people recently diagnosed with HIV.*

*You can get these from support services, or call your local ACON office for copies to be posted to you.*

## A CHECKLIST GUIDE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV (NAPWHA)

NAPWHA has created a checklist guide to assist HIV positive people to work in partnership with their doctor to produce a clear, comprehensive health care plan for living well with HIV. The guide is based on the latest information about treating HIV.

[www.napwha.org.au/publications/  
checklist-guide-people-hiv](http://www.napwha.org.au/publications/checklist-guide-people-hiv)

## YOUR BODY BLUEPRINT (AFAO)

Based around an interactive website, Your body blueprint is designed to encourage and support people living with HIV to lead healthier lives, reduce the risk of illness, and enhance their quality of life.

[www.yourbodyblueprint.org.au](http://www.yourbodyblueprint.org.au)

## SERO DISCO 2 (POSITIVE LIFE NSW)

For both HIV negative and positive people currently in or considering relationships with someone of a different HIV status. Aimed at gay men, but useful to all. Discusses relationships, communication and risk, as well as emotional issues for both partners.

[www.positivelife.org.au/sero-disco-home-2](http://www.positivelife.org.au/sero-disco-home-2)

### WRAPPED OR RAW

Wrapped or raw is a website resource for HIV positive men focusing on having sex with other positive men. Men share their experiences via video on topics such as negotiating sex, hooking up on websites and making decisions about condom use amongst other topics.  
[www.positivelife.org.au/wrappd-or-raw-home](http://www.positivelife.org.au/wrappd-or-raw-home)

### ENDING HIV (ACON)

An initiative to end new HIV transmissions by the year 2020. Doing this is possible by Testing More + Treating Early + Staying Safe.  
[www.endinghiv.org.au](http://www.endinghiv.org.au)

### KNOW THE RISK

Know The Risk is a guide to the risks involved with a variety of practices and situations where guys have made a choice not to use condoms.  
[www.knowtherisk.org.au](http://www.knowtherisk.org.au)

## SUPPORT SERVICES

Meeting other people with HIV who understand what you are going through can be a great way of finding reassurance and answers to your questions. They remember what it was like for them and how they got through this period. Confidential support from a professional can also be invaluable. Most of these services and groups are in Sydney, but ACON regional offices offer support across NSW, and can also tell you about other services in your region.

### ACON

ACON is New South Wales' leading health promotion organisation specialising in HIV and LGBTI Health.

ACON offers services in Sydney and throughout NSW.

Call ACON 1800 063 060

[www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au)

Newly Diagnosed Program

Post-test counselling support for people recently diagnosed with HIV and others affected, including partners, family and friends.

p: (02) 9206 2000



## Genesis

Weekend long, non-residential workshop for gay men recently diagnosed with HIV, run by other gay men living with HIV. Genesis covers issues including: basic HIV information, treatments, sex, telling others, amongst other topics.

## Peer Support

HIV Positive peers work exclusively with positive gay men and provides one-on-one peer support to gay men who want someone who understands, but don't necessarily want to speak to a counsellor.

p: (02) 9206 2000

e: [hivliving@acon.org.au](mailto:hivliving@acon.org.au)

## ACON's Alcohol and Other Drugs Program (AOD)

Provides support services and health promotion programs to people who use illicit (illegal) and licit (legal) drugs.

p: (02) 9206 2000

[www.acon.org.au/alcohol-and-other-drugs](http://www.acon.org.au/alcohol-and-other-drugs)

## StimCheck

Use crystal? Stimcheck provides information about crystal use, your health, privacy and disclosure when talking about your use with a GP and other LGBTI services.

[www.stimcheck.org.au](http://www.stimcheck.org.au)

Substance Support service

ACON's Substance Support service offers individual counselling for LGBTI community members experiencing substance use issues. It provides up to 12 sessions to assist clients with education, reducing harm of use, cutting down or stopping.

p: 9206 2000

e: [intake@acon.org.au](mailto:intake@acon.org.au)

### POSITIVE LIFE NSW

Works to promote a positive image of people living with HIV. Positive Life NSW provides information and targeted referrals and advocate to change systems and practices that discriminate against people living with HIV in NSW.

[www.positivelife.org.au](http://www.positivelife.org.au)

### THE SEROCONVERSION STUDY

Share your story around your HIV diagnosis to help inform government and community organisations around the programs and services offered for positive people.

[www.hivss.net](http://www.hivss.net)

### HIV/AIDS LEGAL CENTRE (HALC)

Free legal advice, information and referral for people living in NSW with an HIV-related legal problem.

p: (02) 9206 2060

e: [halc@halc.org.au](mailto:halc@halc.org.au)

[www.halc.org.au](http://www.halc.org.au)

### MULTICULTURAL HIV/AIDS AND HEPATITIS C SERVICE (MHAHS)

Bilingual and culturally diverse staff can help you with things like: access to the health care system and HIV/AIDS services, emotional support, liaising with case managers or other health care workers, and discussions about treatments. Services are also available to partners and family members.

p: 9515 1234 or 1800 108 098

e: [info@mhahs.org.au](mailto:info@mhahs.org.au)

[www.mhahs.org.au](http://www.mhahs.org.au)

### ASHM - S100 DOCTORS

For a list of S100 prescribing doctors in NSW see fact sheet online.

[ashm.org.au/images/prescriber/ashmprescribers.pdf](http://ashm.org.au/images/prescriber/ashmprescribers.pdf)

## SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRES

Your local Sexual Health Centre (often attached to a public hospital) may also have confidential counsellors available. Look under 'Sexual Health Clinics' in the White Pages for your nearest location, including regional clinics, or visit:

[www.endinghiv.org.au/nsw/where-to-test](http://www.endinghiv.org.au/nsw/where-to-test)

## NSW SEXUAL HEALTH INFOLINK

The Sexual Health InfoLine is a NSW Ministry of Health funded information and referral telephone line and website. InfoLink has been in operation since 1989 and is staffed by specialist sexual health nurses from 9:00am to 5:30pm. InfoLink provides sexual health information and referral to community members and provides specialist clinical support and information to nurses, doctors and other professionals who are treating clients with sexual health issues.

[www.shil.nsw.gov.au](http://www.shil.nsw.gov.au)

## THE INSTITUTE OF MANY

The Institute of Many (TIM) is a peer-run group for HIV positive people, who meet online and socially.

[www.theinstituteofmany.org](http://www.theinstituteofmany.org)

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

In this section: Common terms that a newly diagnosed person may come across in new information provided.

## **AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)**

AIDS is the advanced or final stage of HIV infection, when the immune system becomes vulnerable to many diseases.

## **Antiretrovirals**

The name for treatments that fight HIV (which is a retrovirus). Different antiretrovirals work at stopping the virus replicating at different stages of the HIV replication cycle.

## **ART (Antiretroviral Therapy)**

ART refers to a combination of three or more HIV treatments, from at least two different classes of treatments, which together block HIV's ability to replicate.

## **CD4**

CD4 is a protective white blood cell, also referred to as 'helper' T cell. Working with other parts of the body's immune system, it helps fight off infections. HIV uses CD4 cells to replicate. Doctors check CD4 counts in HIV positive people to measure the strength of a person's immune system.

## **Contact tracing**

Contact tracing is the process of identifying all sexual contacts and contacts who have shared injecting equipment who need to be made aware of their HIV risk.

## **HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)**

HIV is a retrovirus that targets a person's immune system by destroying CD4 cells that are an important part of the immune system. Left untreated, HIV weakens the immune system making it susceptible to contracting other diseases.

## **Immune System**

This refers to the system by which the body protects itself from infections and diseases.

## **Opportunistic Infections**

The name given to a group of infections that take advantage of an immune system that has been damaged by HIV. These infections would not be a concern for a healthy immune system.

## **Replication**

This is the process whereby HIV makes multiple copies of itself, using the body's CD4 cells.

## **Resistance**

Resistance (commonly referred to as drug resistance) occurs when changes in the virus stop the ability of antiretrovirals to work properly. This most commonly occurs when HIV treatments are not adhered to.

## **T cells**

T cells are the family of immune cells which protect the body against infections. Among them are CD4 cells.

## **Viral Load**

This refers to the amount of HIV in a positive person's blood. This is measured by copies of virus per millilitre of blood.

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# Recently Diagnosed HIV+?

## CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

### ACON OFFERS A RANGE OF SUPPORT OPTIONS AND PRACTICAL INFORMATION

#### NEWLY DIAGNOSED program

Counselling support and information for people recently diagnosed with HIV or affected by a HIV diagnoses including partners, family and friends.



One-on-one peer support for recently diagnosed gay men.

#### GENESIS

Genesis is a weekend workshop for recently diagnosed gay men run by other HIV positive gay men.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION



For more about support offered through the Newly Diagnosed Program please contact us:



02 9206 2000



1800 063 060



[www.acon.org.au/ndp](http://www.acon.org.au/ndp)



[intake@acon.org.au](mailto:intake@acon.org.au)

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Follow up is provided within one working day and assistance can be offered through face-to-face or by phone contact.



[ TEST  
MORE ] + [ TREAT  
EARLY ] + [ STAY  
SAFE ] = [ END  
ING  
HIV ]



**PositiveLifeNSW**  
the voice of people with HIV since 1988