



HIV/AIDS Know the Facts

What is HIV?

'HIV positive' means that you have a virus called HIV in your body. It doesn't mean that you are ill, or that you have AIDS, or that you are dying. If you have HIV but don't take treatment, HIV will slowly attack the immune system, which is your body's ability to fight other infections. There are drug treatments for HIV. They can stop HIV reproducing, and so limit the damage to your immune system and keep you in good health. Because of these drugs, most people living with HIV can expect to have a normal life expectancy. HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

What is AIDS?

'AIDS' is different from HIV. AIDS condition occurs when somebody goes a long time without treatment and the immune system becomes very weak. It means that a person with HIV is at risk of developing serious infections and illnesses that a healthy immune system would be able to fight off. Thanks to drug treatments, few people now develop AIDS. If they do, they can usually recover from it. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

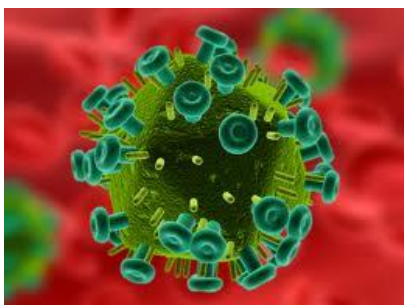
How HIV progresses

HIV weakens the immune system quite slowly, so you won't necessarily feel unwell. You may have briefly had symptoms similar to having flu during the first few weeks after infection. After that, most people who are not on treatment have pretty good health for anything between two and fifteen years. Not many people are diagnosed with HIV immediately after getting infected. If you've only had HIV for a short time, you may have good health for several years, without needing to take HIV treatment.

If you have had HIV for a long time before testing, you may already be ill and your doctor may recommend that you start HIV treatment straightaway. Being ill, finding out you have HIV and being asked to make decisions about treatment can be a lot to deal with all at the same time. **Make sure you know your status an early diagnosis is important to maintaining your health with HIV.**

Looking after your health

You can't tell from someone's physical appearance, if they have HIV or not. And you can't always know how good their health is. But blood tests can show how HIV is affecting your health. Whether or not you are taking treatment, it's important to have some tests done regularly.



HIV Virus - Graphic



Looking after your health cont...

One important test is called a CD4 count and is a measure of the strength of your immune system. A low CD4 count means that HIV is damaging your immune system. A higher CD4 count shows that your immune system is stronger. Another test is called a viral load. It's a measure of the amount of HIV in a sample of blood. If you are taking treatment, the viral load test shows how well your treatment is working – the lower it is the better.

Have these tests done every 4 to 5 months. They will help you and your doctor make decisions about your health and treatment.

HIV treatment

HIV treatment involves taking tablets (ARV's) once or twice a day. ARV treatment stops the virus from reproducing and reduces the amount of HIV inside your body. If there is less HIV, there is less damage to your immune system, and you are less likely to get ill.



And if there is less HIV in your body fluids, you are less likely to pass on HIV (for example to a sexual partner, or to your unborn child during pregnancy).

The aim of HIV treatment is to have an 'undetectable' viral load – this means there is only a tiny amount of HIV in the body. ARV treatment is not a cure – they cannot totally wipe out HIV from your body.

Should I take HIV treatment?

Not everybody with HIV chooses to take anti-HIV drugs straightaway. Treatment will usually be recommended:

- if your CD4 count is below 350,
- if HIV is making you ill,
- if you have another health condition such as hepatitis or TB,
- if you are pregnant, or
- if you want to take it in order to reduce the risk of passing HIV on to a sexual partner.

By knowing your status early you will give yourself enough time to find out about your options and make the right decisions in time.

**Know your status,
know your health** 

Alan Brand
POSITIVELY ALIVE cc
Employee Wellness Consultant and Specialist Trainer
CK2010/002085/23
Mobile: +27 (82) 453-0560
Direct Line: +27 (11) 482-5605
Fax to mail: 086 245 6833
E-mail: albrand@iafrica.com
Website: www.positivelyalive.co.za