

How can living a normal life be sustained for people living with HIV/AIDS?

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Finding out that you or a loved one have HIV/AIDS can be personally challenging, especially in a society where a positive HIV status carries a significant stigma. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the HIV/AIDS stigma comes from people lacking information and awareness about the disease. Although there is still no cure for the disease today, there are medicines that help people with HIV/AIDS live long, happy, and healthy lives.



The HIV treatment called antiretroviral therapy (ART) lowers the virus in the body (called the viral load). The treatment slows down the effects that HIV has on the body and reduces your chances of giving HIV to sexual partners. Some people on ART have such a small amount of the virus in their bodies that they can't transmit HIV to their sexual partners. Even though the treatment is so effective, there are still misconceptions about the spread of HIV and what it means to be HIV-positive today. Education about the disease and practising healthy habits can help people with HIV/AIDS fight the disease and the misconceptions.

Some practical habits to help you live a healthy life with HIV/AIDS:

- **Take your medicine regularly** - Everyone with HIV should be on ART. It can also be called highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) or combined antiretroviral therapy (cART). With a positive HIV diagnosis, you need to start taking ART immediately. Don't skip doses or take your pills randomly. Your medicine can stop working if you start and stop your treatment.
- **Manage physical and emotional health** - Depression is common among people living with HIV, and the stress associated with having HIV can worsen depression symptoms. Moreover, anxiety and depression can exacerbate the physical pain associated with HIV.

Keeping stress, depression, and pain under control can help improve your physical and emotional health, making life

with HIV easier. If you feel you're experiencing depression, get some professional help. Be sure to mention that you are busy with HIV treatments to avoid potential drug interactions between depression and HIV medicines.

- **Quit smoking** - Giving up cigarettes benefits everyone, not just people with HIV/AIDS. Smoking raises your risk of severe diseases, cancer, infections and other illnesses. People with HIV are more likely to develop these harmful consequences of smoking.
- **Exercise your mind** - Mental exercise can keep your mind strong. HIV affects your logical thinking, memory, concentration, and attention. Mental activities, like playing brain-challenging games, will help you maintain your cognitive health.
- **Exercise your body** - Physical exercise can keep your body strong. Regular physical exercises, such as walking, biking, running, swimming, or another activity you enjoy, keep you physically fit, boosts your immune system, reduces stress and enable you to sleep better. Exercising can help you keep and build the muscle mass that people with HIV generally lose. It also allows you to keep your bones strong to avoid osteoporosis (a weakening of the bones).
- **Practice safer sex** - If you have HIV, there are some steps you can take to protect your partner in addition to being on ART. Using condoms is the most common way to practice safe sex. Another helpful method would be to take PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) medication before and after possible exposure.
- **Getting enough sleep** - Sleep is essential to help your body rebuild and boost your energy level. It is common among people with HIV to have trouble sleeping. It is unclear why, but experts suggest that stress, disease, and medication play a role.



Adequate sleep is a prerequisite for overall better health

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- **Eat healthily** - What you consume can ease medication side effects, help you maintain a healthy weight and support your immune system on top of the exercise.

According to the World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)), HIV/AIDS is one of the most manageable chronic diseases. Staying healthy with HIV is in your control, and according to the Medical Schemes Act, HIV/Aids has been classified as a PMB, and therefore medical schemes, like Medshield, will cover your diagnosis, treatment and care of this disease, with certain terms and conditions. Healthy habits will strengthen your body and immune system to defend against illnesses that could threaten your health.

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