

The ageing process does not discriminate and can bring health complications as we get older. There are ways to reduce the impact of ageing by caring for our bodies. Living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is now considered a manageable chronic disease. People with HIV who are on highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART) can now expect a near normal life expectancy.

## Concerns

As we age most people will face health challenges which may include cancer, stroke, cognitive decline, diabetes, reduced bone density, cardiovascular, kidney and liver disease. Some people with HIV may have increased risks of these diseases. For most people with HIV their immune function has suffered damage from HIV infection and ongoing low level inflammation even with effective HAART. This suggests that people with HIV need to pay special attention to maintaining the best possible health.

## Newly Diagnosed?

If you are newly diagnosed with HIV, regardless of your age, research shows that starting treatment earlier will mean better health outcomes for you now, as well as into the future. Improvements in medication have minimised the side effects and tablet regimens can be as simple as one pill daily. However, all medications may have side effects and if your medications are impacting on your quality of life other medication options may be considered. Single tablet regimens (one pill daily) can make taking treatments easier to remember to take and less expensive.

## What can you do?

- Maintain a good relationship with your doctor, dentist and other health professionals. You and your doctor can decide how frequently you'll meet
- If you are sexually active, as part of your routine HIV care, you should also have regular sexually transmitted infection (STI) checks, as STIs can negatively impact your health
- Take a pro-active approach to your health care
- Have regular discussions with your doctor about your concerns and how you can maximise your health

## Healthy Living with HIV

Living with HIV can present challenges no matter what age, so taking measures to live well will help keep your body strong and healthy. Other things to improve health include:

- a well-balanced and healthy diet
- regular exercise
- reducing alcohol and drug consumption
- maintaining regular face-to-face connections with friends, colleagues and your family
- stop smoking
- you can ask your doctor, ACON or Positive Life about ways to improve your health



## HIV Medications

HIV medications have side effects, some of which may be short term and minor, some more serious and longer term. Your S100 doctor (a doctor who is highly specialised in HIV medications) needs to know about all the medication you are using to check for interactions. As you age, you may need to consider changes in your medications, as some HIV drugs speed up the natural decline in such things as heart health, kidney function and loss of bone density. Your doctor is best placed to discuss these issues with you. In addition, ACON and Positive Life have staff who you can discuss treatment issues with you.

## Social Support

Social isolation can be heightened if you are living with HIV. You may have lost friends and family members, moved to a different suburb or city, or finished your work life. You may have experienced discrimination, exclusion, abuse or violence and this may limit your ability to feel connected with people or services. Try to:

- assert yourself to ensure your needs and goals are being met
- take steps towards trying things you have always wanted to do
- don't assume everyone is prejudiced against LGBTI people or people with HIV
- let people get to know you, in the same way as you want to know them
- explore social media groups for people with HIV
- participate in support groups, workshops, classes or clubs available to you

## Mental Health and HIV

People with HIV can have a lot to deal with. Even when effectively controlled by HAART, HIV continues to stir up your immune system and create low level, ongoing (chronic) inflammation. It's not uncommon for people with HIV to experience anxiety and depression some of the time.

- make sure that you speak with your health providers about these feelings and concerns
- talk with friends, partners, family, peers with HIV, counsellors or psychologists

It's important to address these things, because unsolved depression and anxiety can contribute to poorer health outcomes.

## Resources

ACON

[acon.org.au/hiv/news/  
growing-older-with-HIV](http://acon.org.au/hiv/news/growing-older-with-HIV)

Positive Life

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

AFAO

[afao.org.au](http://afao.org.au)

Top Tips for Living Well  
with HIV

[napwha.org.au](http://napwha.org.au)

aidsmap: Ageing and HIV  
[aidsmap.com](http://aidsmap.com)

The Immune System, HIV,  
and Aging  
[treatmentactiongroup.org](http://treatmentactiongroup.org)

Coming of age: a guide to  
ageing well with HIV 2013  
[www.justri.org/COA-2013-  
web.pdf](http://www.justri.org/COA-2013-web.pdf)

The LOVE Project is an ACON initiative aimed at creating better conversations and improved social engagement with older LGBTI community members. By understanding people's needs and preferences the LOVE project aims to facilitate greater social connectivity, improve social inclusion and provide appropriate health information for LGBTI elders.

[facebook.com/LivingOlderVisiblyEngaged](https://facebook.com/LivingOlderVisiblyEngaged) | [twitter.com/LOVEproject](https://twitter.com/LOVEproject) | [Loveproject.org.au](http://Loveproject.org.au)

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