



## HIV INFORMATION

### Primary Care for Early HIV

#### Advice On Self Care, Safer Sexual Practices & A 'Wellness' Programme

##### Self Care - A 'Wellness' Programme

It is important to continually advise patients about how they can be proactive about their health to remain well for as long as possible. This means that they should live a healthy lifestyle and prevent re-infection with HIV.

##### Advise patients to do the following:

###### Have A Healthy Diet

- If possible patients should try to eat healthy foods.
- They should eat fresh foods with plenty of fruits and vegetables, and a balanced diet.

###### Consider Nutritional Supplements

- The use of multivitamin supplements and 'immune boosting' medication have shown some value in reducing some symptoms of HIV like mouth ulcers and diarrhoea. They are also useful if the patient does not have a nutritionally balanced diet.

###### Avoid Smoking

- Tobacco smoke harms the lung's immunity.
- Respiratory infections account for a large proportion of opportunistic infections. A healthy respiratory system is important.
- If a patient smokes, he/she should try to stop smoking or reduce the number of cigarettes per day.

###### Avoid Alcohol Intoxication

- Too much alcohol too often is harmful.
- Many drugs used in HIV disease are possibly harmful to the liver. It is important to keep the liver as healthy as possible, and undamaged by alcohol.
- Advise patients to avoid alcohol in significant quantities.

###### Exercise to Keep Fit

- Exercise and fitness help to keep the body in good shape and will help patients to feel well and strong.
- Moderate exercise strengthens the immune system, though excessive exercise can have the opposite effect.
- Patients must keep in mind not to over-stress the body, especially with symptoms of disease, such as diarrhoea, cough, fever etc.



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### **Avoid taking unnecessary drugs**

- Drugs can be harmful if not taken as instructed and may have side effects.
- Clients should only take medication which has been advised by health workers.

### **Have lots of rest and sleep**

- Rest regularly and get enough sleep.
- If at all possible clients should avoid stress as these hormones can weaken the immune system.

### **Have a positive mental attitude**

- A positive mental attitude promotes health and wellbeing, and helps to keep clients well for longer.

### **Alternative therapies**

- Alternative therapies like acupuncture, massage, homeopathy and traditional healing may also be useful, to relieve symptoms when practiced with medical supervision.
- These therapies can be considered supportive therapy and should not be discouraged in clients with strong beliefs in such treatments.
- Research studies have demonstrated the benefits of such therapies when used in conjunction with ARV treatment.

### **Seek early treatment for medical problems**

- It is important to seek treatment for medical problems as soon as possible.
- Many of the conditions are effectively treated if they are diagnosed early enough.
- Encourage patients to come for treatment as soon as they notice any problems.

## **Safer Sexual Practices**

It is important for HIV positive clients to prevent spreading the virus to others as much as possible. It is also harmful for individuals who are HIV positive to have repeated exposure to varying strains of HIV from others.

### **Give advice about the following:**

#### **Protection**

- If the client is having vaginal or anal sex, he/she must protect himself/herself and the partner by using a condom.





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### **Alternative sexual methods**

- Try to have enjoyable sex and sexual pleasure without penetration. This can be achieved through masturbation and body sex (thigh sex).
- It is also safe to be caressed and to caress one's partner in areas free from sores and broken skin.
- If a man wants oral sex it is important that he uses a condom.

### **Anal sex**

- Try to avoid having anal sex if possible as this carries the highest risk of HIV infection, or use double-strength condoms.

### **Drugs and Alcohol**

- These should be discouraged as they can influence people to have unsafe sex.
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse also contributes to a weakened immune system and can cause damage to organs already under strain from ARVs.

## **Support, Counselling and Referral**

### **Support and counselling should be part of each visit**

Try to offer clients as much support as possible. Let them know that you or your co-workers will be available for them whenever they need advice, support and care. Many people with HIV have fears, anxieties and worries regarding their health and other personal problems. They need to be kept adequately informed about their condition, and they must be encouraged to be part of the treatment and management decisions. It is common for clients in the asymptomatic phase to neglect follow-up checks and monitoring. Occasionally clients 'disappear' and are not seen again, defaulting on life saving medical care and ARVs. Support and counselling can help to encourage clients to maintain regular contact and medical monitoring.

Common areas in which clients need counselling after learning their HIV status include issues regarding his/her sex life in light of his/her HIV status, the responses of family and friends following disclosure, how to cope with work and employers, and side effects that result from ARVs. Encourage the client to share his/her feelings and areas where he/she is struggling. If issues raised are beyond your scope of knowledge, there may be others, or other services and organisations, who can provide the necessary support or advice.

### **Counselling family members**

Remember, a client's husband, wife, lover, family members or friends may also need support, advice or counselling.



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### **Other Agencies or Organisations**

People with HIV may need legal assistance (e.g. to draw up a will or combat discrimination), social welfare advice (e.g. for pension or disability), or advice and support for other medical and social problems.

There are many other agencies and organisations who offer HIV positive people counselling, advice and support.

### **For information on resources and services for HIV/AIDS refer to:**

South Africa AIDS Network  
RD Griesel and JW Wege, Institute of Behavioural Sciences,  
University of SA, PO Box 392, Pretoria 0001

### **Or:**

AIDS Directorate,  
SA Dept of Health  
Private Bag X828 Pretoria 0001

