

10 TIPS

FOR LIVING WELL WITH HIV OVER 50



NEW ENGLAND
ASSOCIATION
ON HIV OVER



NEAHOF





A SMART PLAN

When you were first diagnosed with HIV, you probably wondered how you were going to make it to the next day. Now it's years later. You are living with the virus in a way you never knew you could.

But age will bring newer challenges—challenges that require more than just taking your medications. They will require making smart decisions, keeping your friends, family, and social networks close to you, and staying on your positive path forward to managing your HIV.

Check in the back for important resources.

Stay connected.

Sometimes, as we reach and pass the age of 50, we may begin to feel invisible, like we don't matter. But aging is about keeping your inner strength and vitality. **So now, more than ever, is the time to make yourself heard.** Reach out to your support networks—emotional and financial, new and trusted. Combine them. Revisit them. Here are some examples:

- Support groups
- AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs)
- Therapy or counseling
- Friends
- Family
- Partner/Spouse
- Case managers/Social workers
- Religious or spiritual groups
- Health care providers
- Support programs for substance or alcohol use
- Community meal programs

NOW, MORE THAN EVER, MAKE YOURSELF HEARD.



Healthy Tip

Build a trusting relationship with your doctor or health care professional (HCP).

As you know, your doctor or HCP is your partner in the fight against HIV. The more **openly and honestly** you can **express your needs**, the better your doctor or HCP can keep you on a course of HIV therapy that works best for you.

But sometimes, as you get older, there could be a gap that makes it increasingly uncomfortable for either you or your doctor/HCP to discuss your sexual concerns, like sexually transmitted infections (STIs). That doesn't mean you should keep your concerns to yourself. **Try sharing them with a different doctor or HCP.** If it's still a problem, you may want to **find a doctor or HCP you're more comfortable with.** Of course, **check with your health insurance provider** to make sure that option is available.

DON'T KEEP YOUR CONCERNS TO YOURSELF.



3

Set goals. And stick with them.

You've probably learned that fighting the virus is easier when you have a plan for getting better. Stay around the people who love you—they are a vital source of emotional strength. **Use a calendar to keep track of dates** that are significant to you and your treatment, or to record days you don't feel so well. **Challenge yourself to improve** on and stick with behaviors that may have worked for you before. Stay on a healthy diet and exercise routine. And **go for your regular check-ups** (it helps your doctor or HCP stay up to date on all your health concerns).

As always, **keep track of your lab results**, like your CD4 count, viral load, cholesterol, and glucose levels. They help your doctor or HCP know how well you're doing on your medications—and if they fit your lifestyle needs. And **let your doctor or HCP know how you feel** on your medications—you may not have to settle for uncomfortable side effects anymore, especially with your HIV medications.

FIGHTING THE VIRUS IS EASIER WHEN YOU HAVE A PLAN.



4

Stay on top of your health benefits.

If you have health insurance, stay aware of how much of it covers your HIV treatment. You'll want to know about: your prescription drug coverage, whether your coverage pays for preexisting conditions, and how much will come out of your pocket for doctor visits or prescriptions.

There's also Medicare, Medicaid, the HIV Drug Assistance Program (HDAP), pharmaceutical patient assistance programs, and community health clinics. If you need help understanding your rights under any of the policies, contact your ASO. They know where to go to get the answers.

IF YOU
NEED HELP
UNDERSTANDING
YOUR RIGHTS,
CONTACT
YOUR ASO.



5 Take your medications as prescribed.

Most people do not like to take medication, but here are some things you should know. **Patients over the age of 50 who don't take their medication lose their CD4/T-cells quicker than patients under the age of 50. So be sure to take your medication as prescribed.** Anything less may give the virus enough room to get stronger, making it harder to treat. You may already be taking multiple medications too, which can make it even more challenging for you. But **find ways to make it work. Keep a pill organizer on your dresser. Put Post-it notes on your bathroom mirror.** There are even programs that **send reminders to your cell phone.** Sticking to your HIV therapy schedule is one of the best ways to fight the virus.

MOST PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE TO TAKE THEIR MEDICATIONS, BUT FIND WAYS TO MAKE IT WORK.



6

Keep your doctors or HCPs up to date.

As we get older, menopause and illnesses like prostate cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis become an increasing concern. So get your recommended health screenings—certain illnesses can impact how well your HIV medication will work for you. And **make sure your primary care doctor or HCP and specialists are all up to date on all of your new diagnoses and medications.** It will help your HIV doctor or HCP decide on the best treatment for your needs.

THE MORE
YOU EXPRESS
YOURSELF,
THE BETTER
YOUR DOCTOR
OR HCP CAN
TREAT YOU.



7

Pay attention to your health.

You may already be taking medications for other health problems, like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and liver disease. Some of these health problems may lead to side effects, which may get worse with HIV therapy. So, **what you may see as a sign of age could actually be a side effect of your HIV medication.** Or it may be different medications interacting with each other.

Take note of when and where you first experienced the side effect. Was it something you ate? Was it a specific medication you took? **Has the quality of your life changed in any way** because of these side effects? Are you tired all the time? Do you carry a change of clothes with you in case of an accident? **Be open and honest with your doctor at all times.** These are crucial clues your doctor or HCP will use to determine how to ease those side effects.

WHAT YOU MAY SEE AS A SIGN OF AGE COULD BE A SIDE EFFECT OF YOUR MEDICATION.



8

Decide who (else) should know. And when.

When you first told certain people in your life about your HIV status, it may have been one of the most challenging parts of having the disease. Now, as a person over 50, **you may have built even newer relationships**, for different reasons. You may be moving to a senior community or starting a new relationship. And **because of that, a similar discussion may come up again**. Consider the situation carefully. **Think about how you will tell** your sexual partner and plan the discussion. Everyone's reaction will be different. Be prepared. Use all the resources available to you to make the conversation easier. **You may want to consult with an ASO** to talk about your rights.

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU TELL YOUR SEXUAL PARTNER AND PLAN AHEAD.



Healthy Tip

9 Know your legal rights.

Living with HIV may present challenges that are best taken care of through the legal system. These might include employment, housing, debt, future care, a living will, and powers of attorney. In most cases, they can all be made better with legal help. Just remember, **you have legal resources available to you no matter what your income.** Your ASO is a solid starting point.

YOU HAVE LEGAL RESOURCES NO MATTER WHAT YOUR INCOME.



Healthy Tip

10

Sex doesn't end at 50.
So protect yourself.

You're vibrant, attractive, and vital. None of that ends once you reach a certain age. And it shouldn't end just because you have HIV. **Be smart. Be safe.** And remember, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are still a concern for everyone. So use a condom. It doesn't just help protect your partner. It helps protect you, too. **No protective method is 100% effective. Condom use cannot guarantee absolute protection against any STI.**

REMEMBER,
STIs ARE STILL A
CONCERN FOR
EVERYONE.





YOUR STRENGTH AND SPIRIT HAVE BROUGHT YOU SO FAR. YOU ARE UP TO THIS CHALLENGE, TOO. HOLD ON TO THE PEOPLE AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO YOU. STAY ON YOUR POSITIVE PATH TO MANAGING YOUR HIV.

We want to thank Donna Gallagher, ANP, MS, of the New England AIDS Education and Training Center for her contributions to this resource.

HIV/AIDS INFORMATION

National AIDS Hotline (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

www.cdc.gov/hiv
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
In English and Spanish.
(For the hearing impaired: 1-888-232-6348)
E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

AIDSinfo (National Institutes of Health)

www.aidsinfo.nih.gov
1-800-HIV-0440 (1-800-448-0440)
In English and Spanish.
(For the hearing impaired: 1-888-480-3739)
E-mail: contactus@idsinfo.nih.gov

Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) AIDS Hotline

www.gmhc.org
1-800-AIDS-NYC (1-800-243-7692) or 1-212-807-6655
(For the hearing impaired: 1-212-645-7470)
E-mail: hotline@gmhc.org

The Body

www.thebody.com

AIDS Community Research Initiative of America (ACRIA)

www.acria.org/center/introduction

New England Association on HIV Over Fifty National Association on HIV Over Fifty

www.hivoverfifty.org
1-617-262-5657 or 1-617-233-7107

New England AIDS Education and Training Center

www.neaetc.org
1-617-262-5657
E-mail: aidsed@neaetc.org



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