

DAY ONE . . . After You've Tested Positive

A positive HIV test is scary news to just about anyone. Many people immediately fear it's a death sentence, while others just want to pretend it's all a mistake. While it may make you feel many things, a positive test is also valuable news that may actually make it possible to save your own life. As crazy as it may sound, learning that you're HIV positive is a lucky break - at least compared to the other possible alternatives.

Your HIV counselor or case manager is specially trained to help you handle the news. The real work however, is up to you. Given the right treatment and the right attitude, HIV infection can be managed like a chronic illness; one which you can survive. Making it so requires some effort on your part. You will need to do several things to get yourself started on the road to taking control of your life:

REALIZE THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE. The shock and fear you may experience is what most people go through upon being informed of a positive HIV test. What you are experiencing is quite normal and it will pass. Until this initial phase has passed, *don't hurry to do anything* or let yourself feel rushed or pressured into making decisions until you can think clearly and wisely - *especially* when it comes to making decisions about who you want to tell about your HIV status. Before you begin telling others, talk to your HIV counselor or case manager about the best way to approach this step of adjusting to living with HIV.

LEARN all you can about your disease. The more informed you are the more control you can exercise over what happens to you.

EXPLORE all of the options that are open to you to gain power over your disease through resources, intervention, and the support of other people living with HIV who have empowered themselves with knowledge and health.

TAKE CONTROL by getting feedback about your health. Take tests recommended by your doctor or clinic. Learn about what they mean and what you can do to correct things that need to be corrected.

MAKE CHANGES in your life to adapt to your new situation. This may not be easy at first, but as good results are experienced, change and control will become easier.

REWARD YOURSELF for each step forward no matter how small. You may learn what could become some of the most meaningful lessons of your life. You may find a new kind of happiness in life that you never thought you would ever experience.

REACH OUT. You are not alone. Many persons like you have been exactly where you are and are waiting to extend friendship, love and understanding. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Consider this: being asked for help is an honor and a privilege. By asking someone for help, you are acknowledging their trust and compassion - and are giving them a priceless gift. If you are not ready to join a support group, consider asking your counselor to put you in touch with someone to talk to who is also HIV positive.

GET INVOLVED with community organizations or volunteer work. Some of the most uplifting and empowering energy can come to you through helping others.

HAVE FAITH - THERE IS HOPE. People with HIV and AIDS are living longer lives with increasing quality of life. Even without lifestyle changes or medical treatment, many people who were infected more than a decade ago are still healthy today. The benefits of early intervention can result in extending your health indefinitely - and with it the hope for survival until a cure is found.