

LIVING WELL WITH HIV+



Hiv  **Aids**

HIV Foundation / Finnish AIDS Council

This brochure is addressed to you who have recently learnt about your HIV infection. It provides you with some information on living with HIV/AIDS in Finland.

An HIV-infection is confirmed by a simple blood test. *The test result is reliable when 3 months has passed from the possible infection.*

Receiving an HIV positive test result can be a very difficult period in your life. No doubt being HIV positive will pose new challenges. However, it is still possible to live a fulfilling and long life. Hope plays an important role in an HIV positive person's life. Being confirmed as HIV positive does not mean an exclusion of your earlier life or making a new start in life.

Even if there is no cure at the moment, there is effective medicine, which has improved the life of many HIV positive people around the world. In Finland there are people who have been HIV positive for a long time, and who are living well with HIV.

There are support groups and counselling services to help you to get over the most difficult period and to learn how to live well with HIV. *As an HIV positive person, you will not be left alone. Please seek more information about available services from your local health care professionals.*

HIV TESTING, CONFIDENTIALITY AND COUNSELLING

Testing for HIV is free of charge and can be done with confidentiality at all public health centres. Tests can be done anonymously and in full confidentiality at the Finnish Aids Council's units and Red Cross's Plus-Points. Confidentiality means that medical personnel and social workers cannot reveal your medical status to a third party.

You are advised to have a pre and post-test counselling with the health staff about the implications of having or not having an HIV infection.

GENERAL INFORMATION

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV attacks the body's immune system, making it harder to fight infections. HIV infects the so-called CD4 cells and uses them to make new copies of HIV. The lower a person's CD4 cell count is, the weaker their immune system will be.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. When a person's immune system has been badly damaged he/she will be more vulnerable for infections.

How is HIV passed on? For someone to become infected with HIV, a sufficient amount of HIV must get into his/her blood. The body fluids that are able to contain enough HIV to infect someone are: blood, semen, vaginal fluids, menstrual blood and breast milk.

HIV is transmitted through unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex, through injecting drug use, or from a mother to a child, either during pregnancy, labour or breast-feeding.

Using condoms and clean, disposable needles are easy and affordable means of protection. The risk of a mother-to-child infection can be reduced by the mother's proper medication and other precautions.

With modern combination therapy the virus' presence as well as its damaging effects can be efficiently controlled.

ANTI-HIV MEDICINES

Although there is no vaccine or cure for HIV anti-HIV drugs are available, however. *Taking a combination of anti-HIV drugs (combination therapy) regularly can slow down the damaging effect of HIV on the immune system.*

When a combination therapy is successful, it can improve the health of someone infected with HIV. It makes an HIV positive person less likely to develop opportunistic infections and prolongs the life expectancy. With current medication many of these infections can be treated effectively.



Living well with HIV is not about being on a special diet, abstaining from intimate relationships or stopping living a normal life.

A balanced diet is good enough. There should also be a reasonable amount of exercise and enough rest to keep you well and fit.

It is important to have regular health check-ups, and discuss and receive information on HIV related health situations and risks. It is essential for your well-being to carry on a healthy life style and be as protected as possible from infections.

Sharing your HIV positive status with your closest ones can be supportive for your mental well-being.

FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS

You will benefit from sharing your concerns with people you appreciate and trust. Family and friends can be a tremendous resource. However you are not obliged to tell about your positive test result to your employer or any other person.

Being HIV positive does not mean that life will be less enjoyable. Remember that you cannot pass on HIV through everyday contacts like caring and being cared for, kissing or hugging, living together or sharing your home. As an HIV positive person it is possible to live a normal family life.



Being HIV positive does not mean you cannot have children and that they would automatically get infected. *If you are pregnant or planning to have children, you should discuss your plans with health care professionals.* There are now efficient means to reduce the risk of a child from being infected during pregnancy or labour.

A part of parental responsibility is to make plans for your children's future regarding all possible changes in your life.

If you or your child is HIV positive, you can seek support from the social or health care professionals specialized in HIV on how to deliver the news about the virus to your child. Professional personnel have experience in how to deal with such situations - this can be a great support for you and your family. Please consult or seek support first from the health care professional who is caring for your child, if and when you are planning to tell your child's nursery or school about the infection. Also if the child is on medication, you should help her/him to understand how the medicines work, and why it is important to follow the medical instructions.



Safer sex means sexual activities that hold a minimum risk of HIV infection.

A proper use of a condom protects you and your partner not only from being infected or re-infected with HIV, but also from other sexually transmitted diseases.

Use a condom during oral, vaginal or anal sex, and use a lubricant when needed. Sharing sex toys can also be a risk. Practicing safer sex and using a condom reaffirms your commitment in an intimate relationship and helps to reduce the risk of passing on HIV. The precautions are equally important in casual relationships.

It is good to remember that there are also many other ways to enjoy intimacy and pleasure than just intercourse.

Understanding HIV and discussing your personal situation with health advisers and counsellors helps you to deal better with your sexual and reproductive health.



WHERE TO RECEIVE SUPPORT

Are you infected with or affected by HIV, or do you find it difficult to talk about your fears and concerns relating to HIV?

HIV Foundation/The Finnish Aids Council provides free and anonymous HIV testing and personal counselling as well as peer support at five units in Helsinki, Lahti, Oulu, Tampere and Turku. All personnel are obliged to maintain confidentiality.

HIV testing is available by an appointment. To make one please call us at 0207 465 705. In order for the HIV test to be reliable it should be done after three months from a possible infection. The results will be delivered by personal appointment only, not over the phone. You can also make an appointment for confidential counselling.

The Multicultural HIV Programme in Helsinki provides services in English and in some other languages.

For more information see our website www.aidsCouncil.fi, email us at: eneuvoja@aidscouncil.fi or call our [Help Line at 0207 465 705](tel:0207465705).

You can also approach your local health centre with confidentiality as well as many other organisations offering advisory and counselling services.



HIV Foundation / Finnish AIDS Council

Tel. (operator): 0207 465 700 (Mon–Fri at 9–16)

Hotline and reservations for HIV antibody testing

0207 465 705 (Mon–Fri at 10–15.30)

www.aidstukikeskus.fi / www.aidsCouncil.fi

