

They include TB in other body parts than the lungs, thrush of the oesophagus (food pipe) and herpes sores staying for more than a month. Some cancers more common in people living with HIV, like Kaposi's Sarcoma, cervix cancer and lymphoma, are also included. HIV dementia, which occurs when HIV germs damage the brain, is also stage four.

If you know your stage you can prevent many illnesses

If you are in stage one or two, you know the HIV is still weak. You only need to see a nurse or doctor every three months. You need no tablets apart from optional vitamin tablets.

If you are in stage three or four, you know the HIV has already weakened your immune system. You now need to take cotrimoxazole tablets. They can prevent many illnesses like PCP pneumonia, toxoplasmosis stroke and isospora diarrhoea. Cotrimoxazole can keep you healthy for longer and prevent you from getting AIDS. At stage four you should visit a clinic monthly. You should also eat well

and take optional vitamin tablets. If you have AIDS it does not mean that there is no hope for you. TB of the glands, for instance, is stage four, but can be cured completely. However, your staging will remain stage four even after you have recovered from the TB. At stage three and four you should consider options to use antiretrovirals.



Measuring the strength of the immune system – the CD4 test

To decide when to start antiretroviral treatment, it helps to know your CD4 count. This is a blood test that should be done once a year. A strong immune system has a CD4 count of 500 to 2000. If the CD4 count is below 200 the immune system is weak. You are then at risk of developing an opportunistic infection. It is best to start antiretrovirals at this stage to strengthen your immune system. Antiretrovirals are life-long treatments that help the body to build up the CD4 cells again. The CD4 cells help the communication between the millions of white blood cells in your blood that fight against germs. Some clinics do not provide CD4 counts. They do a less accurate test called total lymphocyte count.

Viral load

Once you start ARVs, viral load measures how effective the ARVs are working in impressing the virus.





Eat to stay healthy

Before doctors in the USA recognised AIDS as a disease, ordinary people had already identified it in Uganda. They called it “slimming disease”. In isiXhosa it is called *isifo ugawulayo*. This means your body gets smaller and smaller like a piece of wood that is being chopped into small pieces. Many symptoms come with HIV. Losing weight is a central part of the disease process of HIV infection. HIV is already inside the body long before you start losing weight. The treatment is anti-retroviral medicines and good nutrition. Eating healthy is important with all diseases. With HIV this is even more so.

Make eating an enjoyable event

Many people living with HIV are badly informed about nutrition. They have been told, “do not eat this or don’t eat too much of that”. To wonder the whole time whether you are eating the right thing is not good. You can get insecure, get doubts or even feelings of guilt. Eating should be an enjoyable relaxed event.

Prevent losing important muscle weight

People living with HIV mainly lose muscle weight. The shrinking of the muscles is not noticed for a long time, because the fat around the muscles is not lost. This hides the loss of the muscle weight. Muscles are made up of a chemical called protein. Thus it is important that you eat protein foods such as meat.

Eat lots of energy foods to prevent wasting

Since your body has to fight the HIV virus as well as other infections, it needs more energy. It is cheaper to eat lots of staple foods like *pap* than to eat lots of meat, which is expensive. Food many people eat every day like *pap*, bread, rice, potato and *mngqusho* contain lots of energy. These foods and fats and oils provide chemicals called complex sugars. Complex sugars provide energy to the body. When your body runs out of these energy rich foods it will use energy stored in your body. Before you were infected with HIV your body would use up stored fat when it needed extra energy. The HIV virus changes this. Your body will now use up protein (stored in muscle) to get extra energy. If you do not eat enough, you will now lose muscle and not fat. This is called wasting. Provided you eat enough energy foods regularly this will not happen. You will prevent your body from losing protein, which is easier than having to top up.



HIV causes poor nutrition. Poor nutrition makes HIV worse. A vicious circle.

HIV lives in your immune system and weakens it. HIV also reduces absorption of food, which weakens the body's ability to resist all kinds of diseases. Poorly nourished people are much more likely to get severe diarrhoea, TB and other infections. Good food helps prevent disease, and also helps the sick body to fight diseases and recover. Don't stop eating when you get sick. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding also need more foods.

Eat lots of fruit and vegetables

The white blood cells of the immune system are made up of protein. They also need vitamins to function well. Your body gets vitamins from fruit, vegetables and meat.

What matters is not so much what you eat, as long as you eat enough

You can eat more if you eat the food you like. Eat the foods you have always eaten. Expensive foods are not better than cheap foods. Often expensive food has been processed a lot in factories, which makes it lose nutritional value. You cannot always believe advertising that says a product is very nutritious. For instance, a plate of soft porridge with a teaspoon of cooking oil is much more nutritious than a plate of cornflakes.

Eat at least three meals a day

Eat three meals a day. It is good if one meal includes some protein (soya, beans, lentils, eggs, fish, chicken, meat, liver, offal, etc.). Try to eat some snack like fruit, nuts, sour milk, *mageu* or left-over food in between.

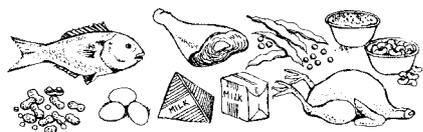
Drinking alcohol and smoking should be discouraged

Alcohol like beer, wine and spirits provide some sugars, but no real nutrition. It also makes you eat less. Alcohol weakens the immune system. Alcohol speeds up reproduction of the HIV germ. Thus alcohol is bad for the health of people living with HIV. Smokers get more chest infections and would often smoke a cigarette instead of taking a snack.



Eating a balanced diet

All foods fall into one of the following three groups:

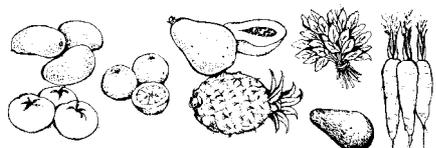


Body-building foods (protein):

beans, soya, peanuts, eggs, meat, fish, chicken.



Energy-giving foods: maize, millet, rice, potatoes, sugar, oils and fats.



Foods with vitamins that protect against infections:

fruit and vegetables.



Try to eat food from each of these groups every day. This ensures a balanced diet. Also remember to eat three to five times a day.

People living with HIV find it difficult to eat enough

Here are some reasons why HIV positive people eat too little. Knowing about these reasons means you can overcome them.

Too little food eaten

You might be too tired or depressed to cook or to go shopping. There might also be no money. You could decide to drink alcohol to forget about HIV instead of eating well. You might have loss of appetite or feel like vomiting. Food often does not taste good when you are sick. You might have a toothache or have sores in the mouth. Thrush infection can make it painful to swallow. Your liver might be swollen, causing it to press on the stomach. This makes it difficult to eat big meals.

Too little food absorbed from the intestines

Once food has been eaten, it is absorbed from the intestines into the blood. This process can be disturbed in people living with HIV. The HIV germs do not live in white blood cells only. They also live in the cells of the intestines. HIV damages these cells and reduces absorption of foods. HIV germs also reduce a chemical in the intestine, which helps to absorb milk products. This can lead to a bloated feeling or diarrhoea after eating milk products, called lactose intolerance. Other germs can also infect the intestines causing diarrhoea. This reduces absorption, because the food moves through the intestines too fast and because the



intestine cells are damaged. Some Antibiotic medicines used to treat infections also kill good bacteria in the intestine that help absorb some foods. Taking too many antibiotics can cause diarrhoea and poor absorption. Worms can reduce absorption and can cause bleeding which leads to lack of iron. Poor nutrition itself damages the cells of the intestines, causing a vicious circle: Poor nutrition – poor absorption – poor nutrition.

Using absorbed foods badly

Sick people need more food, because their metabolic rate goes up. TB especially causes quick loss of weight. The HIV germs also change the way the body uses foods. When running out of energy, instead of using fats, it uses proteins. This causes the hidden loss of muscles.

General hints for people who have trouble eating or maintaining their weight and strength

- Eat the foods you like eating. Eat the same foods you have always eaten.
- Make meals sociable events. Eat with your friends and family.
- Take your time when eating and relax.
- Eat small amounts often. Eat with your fingers when you feel weak.
- Mix vegetable oil, margarine or peanut butter into porridge.
- Eat cooked vegetables. They are easier to eat than raw vegetables.
- Liquid and soft foods (*mageu, amasi*) are easier to swallow.
- If you have diarrhoea, continue to eat foods that do not irritate you.
- Drink plenty of water, especially when you have diarrhoea.
- Take vitamin tablets.
- Go to a clinic for advice and medications for specific problems.

Remember:

- Eating right helps the body resist sickness.
- Eating right helps the sick get well.
- The same foods that are good for you when you are healthy are good for you when you are sick.
- During and after any sickness, it is very important to eat nutritious food.



I am HIV positive, can I still have sex?

Yes, people living with HIV can have healthy sexual relationships. The main way in which HIV is transmitted is through penetrative sex without condoms. You can protect yourself and your partner against this by using condoms every time when having penetrative sex. It is good to always have enough condoms handy. Discuss using condoms beforehand. Take out the condoms so that your partner can see them before you actually start undressing each other. Also avoid other sexual practices that hold a risk of transmitting HIV like exchanging sex toys, fisting and sado-masochist activities.

What do I do if my partner refuses to use condoms?

Speak to him or her. Find out what his/her doubts are about using condoms? Explain that using condoms is more hygienic and prevents the spread of HIV and other STDs. With condoms you can relax and feel safe. You can feel you have good control over your sexual relationship. Make putting on the condom part of your sexual play. Discuss experiences with condoms with other people.

What happens if the condom breaks?

This usually does not happen if the vagina is very moist. In addition some people use lubricant with their condom. It works well to use body lotion. Do not use oil-based lotions like baby oil or paraffin jelly (Vaseline) as they can break the condom. Aqueous creams and Dawn are fine.

If the condom does break, wash yourself with water and remember this: the chances of getting HIV from a single sexual exposure are small. However, a discharge or sores on the private parts increase the chances. If you are worried you can discuss post-exposure prophylaxis with a nurse or a doctor. You can then take antiretroviral medication for a month in order to prevent the HIV from being active in your body. However, health workers would usually only provide this in cases of forced sex. If you are not using family planning tablets or the injection you could get pregnant. Taking some emergency contraception the next morning can prevent unwanted pregnancy. Emergency contraception should be available at all public family planning clinics and all private pharmacies.



My partner is HIV positive, I am HIV positive, why must we still use condoms?

There are two reasons:
Other illnesses can be spread sexually apart from HIV. All these illnesses can be worse in people living with HIV.



Apart from the usual STDs, there is also hepatitis (a germ causing infection of the liver) and Kaposi's Sarcoma (a cancer caused by a sexually transmitted virus). You and your partner might have different strains of HIV and you might re-infect each other. Also, if one of you starts antiretroviral medication the virus can develop resistance to the medication. If your partner gets infected with these resistant viruses the same medications will not work for your partner when s/he starts with antiretrovirals.

Is oral sex safe?

Many people who use condoms for penetrative sex do not like oral sex with condoms although condoms are clean and hygienic. It is best to avoid swallowing semen. To make oral sex safer, special flavoured condoms are available at many shops and pharmacies. It is definitely safer to use a condom. You can have oral sex through a condom on the penis or you can cut the condom lengthwise to open it up and then hold it over the clitoris. Unfortunately there is no "safe sex". We can only provide guidelines on "safer sex" – whatever you do, there always remains a little chance of transmission of some germs, including HIV.

We are using condoms, why must I still use family planning?

Condoms are the best protection against HIV. However, they are only 98% effective against pregnancy. The 2% risk of falling pregnant is more serious for a person with HIV than for a healthy person. That is why you should still use contraception. If it causes irregular bleeding or other side effects, change to another form of family planning. Do not leave it altogether. Should you get pregnant and you are not ready to have a baby you could consider an abortion (termination of pregnancy - T.O.P.). Remember it is better to have a child that you have planned and can look after than to force yourself to go ahead with having a baby from feeling guilty or thinking what your church or other people will say if you terminate your pregnancy.

Can I still have children?

Many people think they will die soon when they hear they are HIV positive. They get a strong urge to have a child to make sure a part of themselves lives on in the child. After counselling they often realise they still have many years to live. They might decide to rather concentrate on a full rewarding life without the responsibilities of a baby. Although you have a right to have a child, if your HIV is already at an advanced stage, you might want to consider rather not having a child as this might make you get sick quicker. You might also not have many years to look after the welfare of the child. Your HIV is advanced if you have lost a lot of weight, feel sick regularly or if your CD4 count is below 200. In this case, it is better to concentrate on finding ways to improve your health, including finding out about treatments that can help.

If you really want a child, and your health is still good, it is your right to have one. Make sure to get the best Mother To Child Transmission (MTCT) prevention program available. Without

