

11

POSITIVE LIVING

Key points:

1. Living positive is about living a healthy life with HIV.
2. Positive living is common sense advice.
3. Positive living is about living longer and enjoying life to the fullest.

Positive living is about living a healthy and full life. We all know that making good decisions about our health is better for our body. But if you are HIV positive, healthy living is essential to your wellbeing. Positive living is about keeping your immune system strong. After starting ARVs, positive living is about giving treatment the best chance to work.

Positive living is mostly common sense advice about your health. The difference is that if you are HIV positive, your immune system is weaker and so healthy living makes an even bigger difference in how it benefits you. Healthy living is not only about living longer; it's about living a good quality of life and enjoying life to the fullest.





ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

The aim of this chapter is to understand the importance of good health decisions.

This chapter talks about:

- Living longer with HIV
- Sex and being HIV positive
- Stress management
- Substance abuse
- Unproven treatments
- Nutrition and HIV



Welcome to Chapter 11 of the Health Literacy manual. In this chapter we look at how to live positively with HIV. “Positive living” is about taking care of yourself so that your immune system can remain stronger for longer, before you need the help of antiretroviral drugs. After you start ARVs, positive living is important for giving the medicine the best chance of success.

Basic rules for better living

(Episode 9, Chapter 1)



Positive living is mostly common sense advice about our health. Most of this advice is as important for HIV negative people, as it is for HIV positive people. The difference is that if you are HIV positive you have a weakened immune system and so positive living makes a big difference to your health. If you are HIV negative, your immune system might be stronger, but it is still important to look after your health and help your body to stay fit and strong. You might know about staying healthy, but we all need to be reminded. Here are some important parts to positive living:

- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet
- Get enough exercise
- Manage your stress
- Stop or cut back on smoking and drinking
- Always seek early and effective treatment of any infection
- Be open about your HIV status

Positive living is about living healthily to keep your immune system strong



WORKBOOK NOTES



Part of positive living is eating healthy and doing exercise you enjoy.

Living longer with HIV

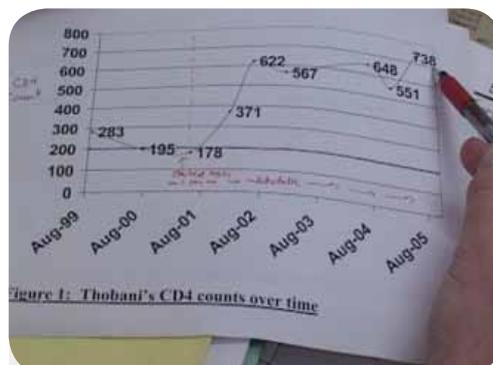
(Episode 9, Chapter 2)



As you have already learnt, HIV attacks your immune system. Your immune system is responsible for defending your body from germs and infections. Any infection can weaken your immune system. That is why it is very important to always get early treatment for infections before they weaken your immune system.

When you are living with HIV, it takes longer for your immune system to recover from an illness. The longer your immune system has to fight infections, the weaker it becomes. If you are HIV positive, it is important to go to the clinic as soon as you feel sick or have any symptoms of an infection, such as a fever, pain, diarrhoea or vomiting. See a health care worker and if you need treatment, start right away. Don't wait to see what is going to happen, because the earlier correct treatment is started, the better.

You have already learnt about opportunistic infections (OIs) and know many of the symptoms and signs of common infections. You might want to read the chapter on OIs again to remind yourself. It is important that you take responsibility for your own health. You don't have to be a doctor or nurse to learn to recognise infections and ask for treatment. We can all learn and ask for appropriate treatment. This is why health literacy is so important.



HIV weakens the immune system and lowers your CD4 count.



Go to the clinic as soon as you have an opportunistic infection – don't wait for it to go away!



DISCUSSION POINTS

In a group talk about the following questions and see if you can answer them.

1. What can weaken your immune system?

Infections can weaken your immune system.

2. If you are HIV positive, why should you not wait to see if an infection goes away?

If you are HIV positive, the longer you have an infection, the weaker it makes your immune system. It is better to get early treatment to get rid of the infection and keep your immune system strong.

3. Why is health literacy important?

Health literacy is important because it helps you learn to recognise infections and ask for treatment.

Sex and being HIV positive

(Episode 9, Chapter 3)



If you are living with HIV, it doesn't mean that you will stop wanting to have sex. For most HIV positive people, if you are healthy and strong, you will want to have sex. In Chapter 5, we have already talked about safer sex and preventing the transmission of HIV. We have learnt about male condoms and female condoms. If you are living with HIV you have a special responsibility to make sure that you do not infect your sexual partners. Being HIV positive does not mean that you can stop using condoms.

Even if your partner is HIV positive, you should still use condoms every time you have sex. This is because there are different kinds (strains) of HIV. You will remember in Chapter 1, we talked about the origins of HIV. In Chapter 1 we also learnt about the different strains of HIV. When you are infected with HIV, you are infected with one strain. If you have sex with another HIV positive person, you can be infected with a different strain of HIV that they might have. If you get infected with more than one strain of HIV, it is harder for your immune system to work. If you are taking ARVs it is also more difficult for the ARVs to work if you have more than one strain of HIV.



Always use a male or female condom every time you have sex.



Stress management

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. Almost everybody will feel stressed at some time in their life. It is normal to feel stressed from time to time, but stress can become a problem if it takes over your life and you cannot cope. Stress can also lead to emotional burn-out, a mental breakdown or depression. This is why it is important to manage the stress in your life.

Emotional stress is usually when people feel that things in their life are out of control or that they cannot cope. This might be caused by many different things, such as problems at work or in your relationships. Physical stress is something that you feel in your body. It is usually pain or feeling very uncomfortable, such as a sore neck and shoulders. Physical stress can make you feel emotionally stressed. And emotional stress can also give you physical pain or discomfort, such as stomach cramps.

Stress management means that you learn to control and reduce emotional or physical stress. This is important for everyone, but it is especially important for people living with HIV because stress can further weaken your immune system and make you ill. Your attitude can influence whether or not you find some situations stressful or not. Someone with a negative attitude is more likely to find situations stressful than someone with a positive attitude.

When it comes to emotional stress, you should also look for support from other people. Everyone needs other people in their lives who they can rely on when they are having a hard time. If you are HIV positive, it is important to have support and people you can talk to. This is why it is recommended that you join a support group when you first find out your HIV positive status. This is also why you are encouraged to disclose your status to someone you can trust. It can be very stressful keeping a secret from people in your life. The aim of telling someone your HIV positive status is to reduce stress and not make more stress for you.

It is also important to make some time to relax. It can be difficult to find the time for yourself, but it is important that you find a way to let go of stress. Some people might find watching TV or listening to music is relaxing. Other people might enjoy cooking or making something as a way to relax. Relaxing with friends is also a good idea because you are also spending time with people who make you feel special and loved.

You also have to make sure that you reduce your physical stress. A poor diet can also put your body under physical stress and weaken your immune system and mean that you get more infections. Not getting enough physical exercise also creates stress in your body and in your mind. Regular physical exercise can help decrease depression and improve your feeling of wellbeing.



Stress is not good for your health.



Make sure you get enough sleep.



Make time to relax with your family and friends.

Some people with HIV manage stress in their lives in the following ways:

- Exercise
- Games and hobbies
- Talking to a friend or to a counsellor
- Making sure you eat properly
- Make sure you get enough sleep
- Some people feel better after a good cry!

When we talk about doing exercise, we don't mean that you have to become a marathon runner! Most experts recommend doing 20 minutes of exercise 3 times a week. You don't have to join a gym. Find something that you enjoy and find a friend to exercise with – it is more fun to exercise with someone and it will help you to keep doing it. Walking fast for 20 minutes is good exercise. For people who walk a lot to and from work or doing their daily chores, that should be enough for you. Some people need more exercise than others. For example, some people will want to run or play a team sport, like soccer.

All of these can help fight against stress. The important thing is that you don't keep stress building up. Try to keep positive. Talk to a friend or someone you feel you can trust. Sharing how you feel can make a big difference in coping with stress in your life.



Exercising is good for your physical and also mental health.



DISCUSSION POINTS

In a group talk about the following questions and see if you can answer them.

1. What is stress?

Stress is when you feel emotional or physical tension. Things might feel out of control and you might feel like you cannot cope.

2. Why is stress management important if you are HIV positive?

Stress management is important if you are HIV positive because stress can further weaken your immune system and increase the chances of you getting infections.

3. What can you do to reduce or control stress in your life?

You can exercise regularly, eat properly, get enough sleep, talk to a friend or counsellor and take time to relax.



WORKBOOK NOTES

Substance abuse

(Episode 9, Chapter 4)



Substance abuse is smoking, drinking alcohol in excess and taking drugs. None of these things are good for your health. It is difficult to change habits that we may have had for a long time, but if we wish to live longer and have a better quality life, it's important to make the effort.

Smoking cigarettes is bad for your health. Smoking is the single greatest cause of heart disease. Smoking cigarettes, lack of physical activity, being overweight and eating badly are all bad for the heart. Cigarette smokers are also more likely to get respiratory disease. Passive smoking is when a non-smoker breathes in smoke made by someone who is smoking. Non-smokers who breathe in second-hand smoke can get many of the diseases that a smoker gets. The good news is that it's never too late to quit. Most of the harmful effects of smoking can be reversed. Studies have shown that if you smoke and are HIV positive, you are more likely to develop PCP pneumonia, thrush and oral hairy leukoplakia. All these infections develop more quickly in people who smoke. If you are HIV positive, there is even more reason to stop smoking.

Alcohol is not good for your health, if you are HIV positive or HIV negative. Regularly having more than 2 drinks a day increases your chances of becoming an alcoholic and developing liver disease and some kinds of cancer. Alcohol in moderate amounts (1 drink a day) is not bad, but many people cannot stop at 1 drink. Drinking more than 2 drinks is bad for your health and excessive drinking weakens your immune system. There are many reasons for giving up alcohol when we have HIV. Alcohol also reduces the benefit we get from vitamins. If you have to drink, try to have just 1 or 2 drinks.

If you are taking ARVs, drinking is especially bad because alcohol is broken down in the liver and many ARVs are also tough on the liver. This means that drinking and taking ARVs can damage your liver.

Another problem about drinking if you are on ARVs is that drinking can make you forget to take your ARVs. Drinking too much can also make us more likely to put ourselves and others at risk of having sex without a condom. Explain to your friends why you're not drinking and get their support.

Drug abuse is very bad for both HIV negative and HIV positive people. Drug abuse is most often called substance abuse, along with the abuse of other things like alcohol. Most drugs are illegal. Depending on what the drug is, a drug will result in health problems, social problems, physical dependence and also psychological addiction.



Smoking cigarettes is bad for your health.



Drinking alcohol in excess is not good for your health. If you are on ARVs you should try not to drink.

Smoking, drinking alcohol in excess and taking drugs is bad for your health

Unproven treatments

(Episode 9, Chapter 5)



Most of us have seen advertisements for so-called medicines and treatments for HIV and AIDS. There are many people who claim to have found a cure. We have already talked about myths about HIV and AIDS and know that there is no cure for HIV and AIDS. Many of these treatments are advertised in newspapers and use scientific-sounding language, like 'immune boosters', which can make them seem true. These treatments are not tested and are called 'unproven medicines'. The people who sell them are not medical doctors and are business people who are making money out of people who have chronic illnesses, such as HIV, cancer or arthritis. Unproven medicines can be dangerous or even kill people who take them.

Unproven treatments even if called 'immune boosters' do not cure HIV

- Swollen Glands
- TB
- Arthritis
- Bladder disorders
- Erectile Dysfunction
- HIV/AIDS
- Diabetes- better the blood flow
- Tiredness
- Sores that do not heal
- Cancer / cancer treatment
- Perspiration at night
- Sinusitis
- Skin disorders
- Sjingles



Unproven treatments are dangerous for your health.



DISCUSSION POINTS

In a group talk about the following questions and see if you can answer them.

1. What are unproven treatments?

Unproven treatments are treatments that are not tested or do not have proven benefits. Many unproven remedies claim to cure chronic diseases, such as AIDS, diabetes and cancer.

2. Why are unproven treatments dangerous for people living with HIV?

Unproven treatments can further weaken the immune system and increase the production of HIV. Many unproven treatments also reduce the effects of ARVS by limiting the ways that the medication is absorbed by the body.

Nutrition and HIV

(Episode 9, Chapter 6)



Nutrition and HIV has become a very controversial subject in South Africa. Good nutrition is very important for our health, but some people exaggerate the powers of certain foods. It is true that if you have poor nutrition and are HIV-positive, HIV disease progresses faster when compared to people with good nutrition. The reason for this is that if you have bad nutrition, your body is weak and your immune system in particular cannot help fight infections. This does not mean that a good diet can cure you of AIDS or prevent you from getting HIV. A good diet just means that you are keeping your body healthy and helping your immune system by keeping it strong. That is why eating a balanced diet is part of living positively with HIV.



Some people claimed the African potato could cure you of AIDS but no health benefits have been proven.

Food groups

We can divide the food we eat into three groups:

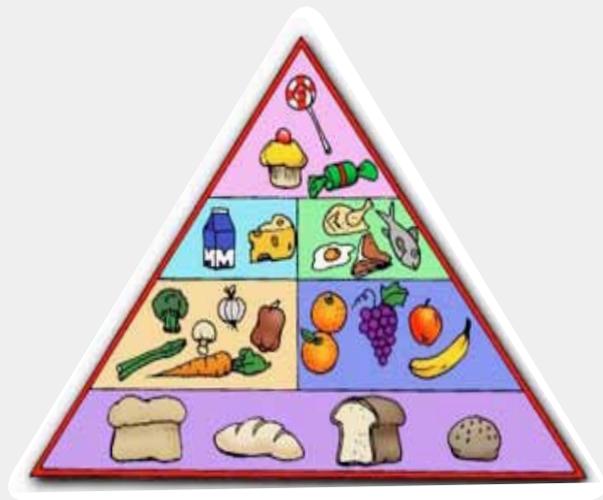
- **Building foods** are our proteins, like milk, meat, chicken, fish, eggs, soya, lentils, peanuts and sprouts. They build muscle that gives us strength.
- **Energy foods** are rich in carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are things like maize meal, rice, samp, pasta, bread and potatoes. Oils are also important energy foods and include margarine, butter, and sunflower oil. They give us energy to use our muscles. Sugar also gives us energy, but we should not eat too much sugar. There are also natural sugars in fruit, which are healthy.
- **Protective foods** are foods that boost our immune system. These include all fruits and vegetables which have many different vitamins and minerals.

A balanced diet means that we eat food from each group in every meal. For example, we can have samp (carbohydrate for energy) and beans (protein for building) with spinach and pumpkin (protective food for the immune system). Many South Africans think that you have to eat meat every day. This is not true. In fact too much meat in your diet is not good for you because of the fat and high cholesterol.

Many people also do not eat enough fruit and vegetables. Fruit and vegetables don't have to be expensive. Eat what is in season and locally grown, because it will be the cheapest and the best for you. Also try and mix the colour of your vegetables. For example, try mix a green (spinach) and an orange vegetable (pumpkin), because they will give you different vitamins and minerals.

Growing your own food in a food garden can help you stay healthy and get exercise. Growing your own food can also be cheaper than buying food, especially if you grow food in a co-op or with a group of neighbours or friends. Try and see if there is a food garden in your area and ask if you can join.

If you are HIV positive, it is best to avoid too much greasy and fatty food. You should also not have too much coffee, salt, sugar or sweets. Drinking tea and coffee with meals reduces the body's absorption of iron. Processed and refined foods, like white bread, are not good for us because they have less fibre and nutritional value and more sugar, salt, fat and artificial additives. Try to rather eat brown bread and avoid fast food, which is expensive and has low nutritional value.



This food pyramid shows which foods we need to eat most of (bottom) and which foods we need to eat in small amounts (top). Fruit and vegetables make up the bulk of our food needs, after carbohydrates.



DISCUSSION POINTS

In a group talk about the following questions and see if you can answer them.

1. What are the different kinds of food?

There are building foods, energy foods and protective foods.

2. Give examples from the different food groups.

Building foods are proteins, such as meat, beans and fish. Energy foods are carbohydrates like maize meal, rice, samp, pasta and bread. Oils and sugar also give us energy. Protective foods are fruits and vegetables.



WORKBOOK NOTES

Vitamins and supplements

Vitamins have been another area of controversy in South Africa. It is very important to understand that vitamins will not prevent or reverse AIDS. The Department of Health's guidelines on nutrition for people with HIV/AIDS and other chronic diseases say, "vitamins are not a treatment for the disease".

There is no need to pay for the Vitamin B supplements, folic acid and multivitamins. You can get them free from your clinic, prescribed by a doctor if you need them. Many people believe that because they are HIV positive they have to take vitamins. If you eat a balanced diet, there is no need for you to take extra vitamins, unless your doctor thinks you need them. Vitamins are expensive and it probably makes more sense for you to spend that money on buying food.

Multivitamin pills are not a substitute for food. We must take them on a full stomach. This means you must take vitamins AFTER you've eaten something. You should always talk to your doctor or health care worker about any food supplements you are taking. It is also not a good idea to take more vitamins than is recommended. Large doses of vitamins can cause side-effects. For example, too much vitamin C can cause diarrhoea.

Some people say that healthy foods and multivitamins (combinations of vitamins) can help slow down the progression from HIV to AIDS. But this has not been proven and eventually, you will develop AIDS if you do not start ARVs. No matter how good your diet is, HIV continues to multiply itself and it will eventually overpower the immune system. Vitamins and healthy foods could just delay the process by keeping your immune system as strong as possible. Remember, vitamins can support our diet but they are never a substitute for healthy eating. Neither vitamins nor healthy eating or individual foods are a treatment or a cure for HIV.

DISCUSSION POINTS

In a group talk about the following questions and see if you can answer them.

1. What vitamins can we get free from our clinics?

We can get Vitamin B supplements, folic acid and multivitamins free from a clinic if your doctor prescribes them.

2. Why don't we need to take vitamins if we eat a balanced diet?

If we eat a balanced diet we get all the vitamins and minerals we need and so we do not need extra vitamins.

3. Why are vitamins not good in large quantities?

Vitamins in large amounts are not good because they can give you side-effects such as diarrhoea.



Multivitamins are not a substitute for food.

How to prepare your food

If you do not have access to tap water, you should be very careful that the water you use to drink and prepare food is clean. When we talk about water being clean or safe, we are talking about it not having any bacteria and other pathogens in it that can make us sick. The simplest way to make sure that water is safe or clean is to boil it. Boiling water kills germs (pathogens).

We must all remember to wash our food carefully before we cook it. We should also always wash our hands before and after touching food and cooking. This is particularly important for HIV positive people, because it helps avoid germs from entering the body. You should also always wash your hands after going to the toilet. This helps us avoid germs that could make us sick.

We should avoid over-cooking our foods. Vegetables should keep their bright, fresh colours when we cook them. If you boil vegetables for a long time, you lose all the vitamins because they will be boiled out of the vegetables and be in the water.

One way of making sure you do not lose these vitamins is by using the water to make a soup. Another way to make sure that the vitamins stay in the vegetables is to steam them. You can put a little water in a pot and bring it to the boil. Put your vegetables in a sieve and balance it over the pot without the water touching the sieve and put the lid on. It is also a good idea to try and eat some of your vegetables raw, such as carrots and salads.

We should not eat old and stale food. If you do not have a fridge, try and cook enough for each meal so you do not have extra that could go off.

If you buy meat, make sure it is fresh and cook it on the same day. Many bacteria can easily start to reproduce in meat, especially chicken and pork, if it is left out of the fridge. Fresh food is always the healthiest.

Drink lots of water. Try and drink at least 1 litre a day. You need to drink lots of water, because water makes up 60-70% of our bodies. Your blood is mostly water and your muscles, lungs and brain all contain water. Your body also needs water to control your temperature and to move all nutrients around your body. If you are active, you need to drink more water. You need water long before you feel thirsty, so try and drink water throughout the day. Fruits like apples and oranges are also sources of water.



Boiling water kills any germs that can be in the water.



You should always wash your hands before and after going to the toilet, and before and after preparing and cooking food.

Try to use only fresh ingredients and don't overcook food



Drink lots of water. If you do not have water that is clean, boil it first before drinking it.



MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Name :

Circle the correct answer for each question. You can only choose one answer for each question.

1. Which of these statements is true?

- a) Positive living means joining a gym and eating expensive food.
- b) Positive living is about lots of rules.
- c) Positive living is about living a healthy life.
- d) Positive living is very complicated.

2. Which of the following is not part of positive living?

- a) Eating a balanced and nutritious diet.
- b) Running marathons.
- c) Stopping or cutting back on smoking and drinking.
- d) Always seeking early and effective treatment of any infection.

3. Which of the following does not weaken your immune system?

- a) Drinking lots of alcohol.
- b) Infections.
- c) Smoking.
- d) Exercising.

4. Why do you still need to use a condom if you and your partner are both HIV positive?

- a) You can't trust your partner.
- b) You can get re-infected with a different strain of HIV.
- c) You can get HIV.
- d) Your partner can't trust you.

5. Which is not a good way to cope with stress?

- a) Getting drunk.
- b) Talking to a friend.
- c) Doing exercise.
- d) Getting enough sleep.

6. Which one of the following statements is true?

- a) Unproven treatments can cure you of AIDS.
- b) Unproven treatments boost your immune system.
- c) You should never take unproven treatments.
- d) ARVS are unproven treatments.

7. Why is nutrition important if you are HIV positive?

- a) Vitamins can cure you of HIV.
- b) Good nutrition helps your immune system keep strong.
- c) Good nutrition means you don't need ARVs.
- d) Nutrition can prevent AIDS.

8. Which kind of food is not good for us?

- a) Bread, samp and potatoes.
- b) Meat and beans.
- c) Fast food.
- d) Fruit and vegetables.

9. Which statement is true?

- a) You should always boil your vegetables for a long time.
- b) You should eat vegetables and fruit every day.
- c) You should only eat vegetables and fruit.
- d) You should only eat vegetables.

10. Which statement is true?

- a) Health literacy is knowing how to identify symptoms and ask for treatment.
- b) Health literacy is telling nurses what to do.
- c) Health literacy is not needing to go to the clinic.
- d) Health literacy is taking unproven treatments.



WORKBOOK NOTES

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