

Getting HIV Care: What You Need to Know

I'm HIV positive but feel fine. Do I need a doctor?

Medical advances have made HIV highly treatable. If you're HIV positive, you can greatly prolong your life and maintain your health—as long as you have the right medical care and services. Even if you do not yet need HIV medication, a doctor can advise you on how to stay healthy and whether and when to start medication. To find a doctor or clinic, visit directory.poz.com.

Can I get care and treatment without insurance?

If you're a U.S. resident and don't have private insurance, such as through an employer, you may be eligible for Medicaid or Medicare. You can also ask an AIDS service organization to help you find a care provider or health clinic that accepts Medicaid or Medicare. In addition, many drug companies have programs to provide medication to people with low income or no insurance. Check with your AIDS service organization; to find one, visit directory.poz.com.

What if I'm not a legal U.S. resident?

Your AIDS service organization can help you find programs and clinics which provide free or low-cost care or medication to people who are not legal residents. Even without insurance or legal immigration status, you have the right to treatment in the event of an emergency.

What kind of care do I need?

You'll need a doctor with experience treating people living with HIV, and for women, a gynecologist with knowledge in HIV. You may also need to see another specialist, such as a liver doctor (hepatologist) or a cardiologist, if you have another health condition besides HIV.

What should I look for in a doctor?

Remember, your doctor works for you. Here are some things to look for:

- **Knowledge and experience:** Ask your doctor how familiar he or she is with HIV and how many HIV patients he or she treats.
- **Communication:** It's important to feel comfortable with your doctor. You should feel you can talk to your doctor without being judged, especially about sex, drug use and any problems you're experiencing with medication. If your doctor does not speak your language, consider finding a doctor who does (or request translation services at all of your appointments).
- **Availability:** You should be able to get an appointment within a reasonable amount of time, and your doctor should be able to spend at least 20 minutes with you. If something is really bothering you and your doctor cannot see you right away, ask to see another doctor. And if you are experiencing emergency symptoms such as trouble breathing or chest pain (ask your doctor for other urgent signs) go to an emergency room or call 911.

QUICK TIPS

Many clinics, hospitals and AIDS service organizations (to find one, visit directory.poz.com) help people with HIV in the following areas :

■ CARE AND MONEY

Case managers and social workers can coordinate care and help arrange medical, financial and legal support.

■ MEDICINE

Pharmacy services work with you, your doctor and your insurance provider to monitor your meds and avoid dangerous drug interactions.

■ DIET

Nutritionists can advise you how to improve your diet, especially if you're having difficulty maintaining your weight or having problems with cholesterol, triglycerides or blood sugar.

■ LANGUAGE

Translators are vital for those who don't speak English or are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

■ DENTAL/ORAL HEALTH

Referrals to dental care are important for people with HIV, who may be at higher risk for dental and oral problems.

■ MENTAL HEALTH

Referrals to mental health specialists are crucial if you're struggling emotionally or suffer from depression. Ask your case manager or doctor for referrals to a counselor or psychiatrist. Untreated, depression can interfere with your care and treatment.

For more HIV tips,
visit poz.com