



# Positive Connections

# **Understanding HIV**

## Myths, Truths, & Prevention



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# Understanding HIV: Myths, Truths, & Prevention

## Chapter 1:

9 Myths about HIV (& Truths).....	4
-----------------------------------	---

## Chapter 2:

7 Early Signs and Symptoms of HIV Infection.....	8
--	---

## Chapter 3:

What Are the Treatment Options for HIV? .....	12
---	----

## Chapter 4:

The Emotional Impact of HIV Treatment .....	17
---	----

## Chapter 5:

How ARcare Supports You Through HIV Treatments .....	20
--	----

## Chapter 6:

The Basics of HIV & STD Prevention.....	23
---	----

# Introduction

HIV, or human immunodeficiency virus, is a virus that attacks the immune system, the function of the body that fights infection and disease. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, about 1.1 million Americans live with HIV, although 14% do not know they have it.

Read in one sitting, this eBook from ARcare serves to educate you on HIV, its treatment, and its prevention. Chapter one explores nine myths surrounding HIV and clarifies the misinformation you have probably heard about it. Chapter two examines seven early signs and symptoms of HIV, chapter three highlights the treatment options available to you, and chapter four looks at the emotional impact of treating the condition. Chapter five examines what ARcare offers you during your treatment, and chapter six breaks down the basics of preventing HIV and STDs.

Let this eBook guide, inform, and encourage you as it illuminates the most crucial information surrounding the condition.



## CHAPTER 1:

# 9 Myths about HIV (& Truths)

Many myths have surrounded HIV for the past 30 years. This chapter highlights a few of those myths and clarifies what misinformation you have probably heard. Here are a few of the popular myths and truths about HIV.

### **Myth #1: Touching someone with HIV will infect the other person.**

Contrary to early fears, [HIV does not spread through touching](#). Since the virus causing HIV cannot survive outside the body of a person, you will also not get affected by HIV if you touch, hug, or kiss an infected person. Similarly, if you share the same utensil or breathe the same air, you will not become infected.

HIV passes through body fluid and blood of an infected person. Thus, you are more likely to get HIV if you have unprotected sex with an affected person or share a needle with them, or accept blood from such a person.

### **Myth #2: Mosquitos spread HIV.**

People believe that since HIV can be spread through blood, mosquitos, or other blood-



sucking insects can spread HIV infection.

HIV is not an infection that gets spread through a mosquito bite. When a mosquito bites, it sucks your blood. It does not inject the blood of the person whom they bit before. Even if the mosquito bites an HIV positive person, the virus cannot survive inside the body of the mosquito.

Thus, it is not possible for mosquito or other blood-sucking insects to spread HIV.

### **Myth #3: HIV cannot spread through oral sex.**

Although HIV infestation through oral sex is negligible when compared to other sources, it cannot be completely ignored. The [chances are low](#), perhaps even nonexistent, but there is a possibility nonetheless.

### **Myth #4: You can figure out an HIV person from the symptoms.**

Once a person is infected with HIV, they may not show any symptoms. They might even look healthy for years. However, the symptoms vary from person to person.

[Certain symptoms](#) like fever or fatigue are very similar to the symptoms of other types of infections. Initially, the symptoms last only for a few weeks, making it difficult to conclude whether or not that person is HIV positive.

## **Myth #5: HIV will not spread if you are undergoing treatment.**

When you are under antiretroviral drugs, the virus count in your blood comes down drastically, and it does not show up in a blood test. This is known as undetectable viral load. This only means that the viral load is less. There is always a chance for the virus level to increase during treatment. Your chance of spreading HIV comes down drastically, but it is not zero.

## **Myth #6: If both the partners are HIV positive, then there is no need to worry. You can have unprotected sex and even share needles.**

This is false. There are different strains of HIV, and if you do not protect yourself while having sex, there is a chance that you might contract a different strain of the infection. Moreover, the chances of contracting other sexually transmitted diseases are also very high if you have unprotected sex.

## **Myth #7: People who are straight do not have to worry about HIV.**

It is true that the incidence of [HIV is high among homosexuals](#). This does not mean, however, that heterosexuals do not contract HIV. If you have unprotected sex with an

HIV infected person, then you are more likely to get infected irrespective of whether the person is of the same gender or not.

### **Myth #8: HIV positive people can have only HIV positive children.**

Because of the advancement in the field of medicine, it is now possible for an HIV positive woman to deliver a baby who is not HIV positive. If your doctor prescribes you medicine, then you should take it throughout the pregnancy and continue giving the medicine to the baby as well after birth. If proper medication is taken, then the chances of the baby contracting the disease are very low.

Moreover, it is safe to refrain from feeding the baby, as breastmilk is one of the body fluids that can transmit HIV.

### **Myth #9: Contracting HIV is the end of your life.**

Many years ago when there was no specific treatment for HIV, many thought contracting the disease was the end of your life. However, this is no longer the case. There are effective drugs that can extend your lifespan and provide you with many productive years. As long as you take the prescribed medication, you can live a normal life.

HIV is not the end of life. If you get tests and take medication at the right time, then you can keep the virus suppressed, leading to a fruitful and productive life. Do not lose hope,



and remember that you are in control.

## CHAPTER 2:

# 7 Early Signs and Symptoms of HIV Infection

Early detection of HIV can help prevent co-infections and dramatically improve prognosis expectations. To accurately detect this type of infection, you must remain highly aware of the behaviors that increase your risk of developing this condition. In addition, you must immediately seek care from your doctor if you start to exhibit the [initial symptoms of HIV infection](#).

For the best prognosis, early detection of an HIV infection is crucial. Stay proactive about your health by learning to identify the seven signs and symptoms of HIV that warrant a prompt visit to your doctor.

## 1. Fatigue

A sudden, pronounced drop in energy levels can signal the start of an HIV infection. Upon detecting the virus circulating your system, your body mounts an immediate immune response. The immune response can make you feel wiped out for several weeks as your system works hard to reduce or eradicate the viral load.

## 2. Fever

A major part of [your body's immune response](#) is a marked increase in temperature, or fever, that helps to create an environment in which the virus cannot survive.

Fever temperatures can vary and could be as low as 100 degrees at times. The high temperatures may occasionally break, especially while taking over-the-counter fever reducers but will likely return a few hours later.

## 3. Night sweats

This is a common symptom of HIV. With the fever complicating this symptom, you might wake up sweating despite feeling chilled. Although this symptom often occurs during the acute phase of the virus, night sweats may continue through later stages of the illness as well.

## 4. Rash

With up to 85 percent of patients exhibiting this symptom, a viral rash is a common early sign of HIV. The rash typically consists of small, barely raised red or purple spots. You may notice the rash covering your torso, arms, and face. Even more telling, the rash may cover the palms of your hands, which is an area rarely impacted by other skin conditions.

## 5. Oral ulcers

As the fight against the virus takes a toll on your immune system, you might notice ulcers appearing on your lips, cheeks, and gums. The ulcers are often painful, especially while eating or drinking, and can also cause pain in your teeth and jaw.

## 6. Lymph node inflammation

The continued immune response can cause your lymph nodes to fill with fluid, which makes them look swollen and feel tender. The lymph nodes in your neck are affected most often, though the swelling can spread to the nodes in your groin and armpits as well. The lymph fluid will continue to accumulate in all of these nodes as your body fights against the HIV infection.

## 7. Sore throat

In its acute stage, HIV can cause a severe sore throat to develop. The sore throat may



make it difficult to eat or drink without feeling pain and discomfort throughout your entire esophagus. When experienced with the mouth ulcers and swollen lymph nodes, you might start to lose weight from the inability to eat enough to nourish your body.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

# **What Are the Treatment Options for HIV?**

There is no cure for HIV. There are, however, medications that can help you control the infection in a better way. The current treatment aims to prevent HIV from multiplying, transforming into AIDS, and spreading it to sex partners.

## **What is the treatment for HIV?**

HIV treatment involves medicines called antiretrovirals (ARV). Your doctor will usually combine 3 of these drugs to help control the infection. This combination therapy is known as highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART). It greatly reduces the complications related to HIV as well as minimizes the chances of changing HIV to a drug-resistant strain.

## **What are the medications used for treating HIV?**

[HIV cocktail-therapy includes 3 drugs](#) from two of the following classes of antiretrovirals.

One class called non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs) block the HIV protein called reverse transcriptase. The virus needs this protein to integrate its genetic material into yours and make copies of itself. Examples include efavirenz (Sustiva) and rilpivirine (Edurant).

Another class called nucleoside, or nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs), are faulty building blocks HIV uses to copy itself. Examples include combination regimens like lamivudine-zidovudine (Combivir) and emtricitabine/tenofovir (Truvada). Your doctor will use two NRTIs with a third drug from any of the other listed classes.

Protease inhibitors (PIs) is a class that turns off an HIV protein called protease, also needed by HIV to produce copies of itself. An example is a drug named indinavir (Crixivan). Fusion inhibitors impede HIVs entry into your immune cells. An example is a drug named enfuvirtide (Fuzeon). Integrase inhibitors block a protein called integrase that HIV uses to integrate its genetic code into your immune cells.

You need to take these medicines every day as prescribed for the rest of your life unless your doctor says otherwise.

## **Antiretroviral therapy**

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) refers to a combination of medications health professionals use to stop the HIV virus from multiplying. This leads to a lower HIV count, which helps decrease your risk of developing complications. It also provides your immune system with



a chance to become stronger and reduces the risk of having HIV progress to AIDS.

The specific combination of drugs that are used varies from person to person based on different factors. These factors include the presence of other medical conditions and potential drug interactions as well as the cost, convenience, and potential side effects. Generally, however, ART combines a minimum of three drugs from two drug classes. Doing this helps prevent HIV strains that are resistant to certain drugs.

## **Side effects of HIV medications**

Some common side effects include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and other digestive issues. Other side effects include higher blood sugar levels and cholesterol levels as well as an increased risk of heart disease. Some individuals experience bone loss and changes in muscle tissue when they take HIV medications.

Your doctor will discuss these potential side effects with you in greater detail before you start taking any medications.

## **Is treatment necessary?**

Yes, it is highly important to get treatment for HIV. You may have HIV but still not feel sick and may delay treatment. However, the longer you delay, the greater are your chances of developing AIDS. A lack of treatment also puts you at risk of developing illnesses that generally come with aging, termed as non-AIDS related ailments.

On the other hand, timely HIV treatment slows the virus from replicating itself — one of the [7 stages of the HIV life cycle](#). Timely treatment also offers other health benefits.

These benefits include preventing further damage to your immune cells, reducing your risk of HIV-related complications, minimizing your risk of developing AIDS, keeping non-AIDS related ailments such as heart diseases, kidney problems, and liver and brain disorders at bay, and lowering the chances of passing on HIV to others by reducing the levels of virus in your blood

## **What if you do not have any health insurance? Can you still get HIV treatment?**

Yes, you can find the care and treatment for HIV across the U.S., including Arkansas rendered by the Ryan White Program medical providers. The Ryan White Program is for those with HIV/AIDS who do not have health insurance or cannot afford the medical services.

## **How to know if your HIV treatment is working?**

Your doctor will monitor the levels of virus (viral load) and immune cells in your blood to assess your response to HIV treatment.

Your HIV drug cocktail will be effective if it is able to lower your viral load to undetectable

levels. This does not mean that your body no longer carries HIV. It just means that the viral levels in your blood are low enough to be detected on testing.

HIV targets the immune cells. A dropping immune cell count means that the treatment is not working well. A stable count, on the other hand, means the therapy is effective.

## **What is the biggest obstacle faced during HIV treatment?**

Sticking to your treatment plan is the biggest hurdle. A busy schedule can make you forget to take pills every day as prescribed. Side effects from the HIV pills (such as nausea and vomiting) may also make you avoid the scheduled dose altogether.

Skipping your medicines even once in a while can cause the virus to multiply or mutate. Talk to your health care provider at the treatment center. There are medicines and other helpful tips to tackle the most common side effects.



## CHAPTER 4

# The Emotional Impact of HIV Treatment

As you begin HIV treatment following your diagnosis, common feelings of shock or disbelief tend to outweigh a stronger emotional response. You can help ensure that your treatments offer continual positive outcomes by managing your emotional state.

## Stages of grief after diagnosis

The first of the [five stages of grief](#) often begins upon diagnosis. You might experience denial and then anger in the earliest days after diagnosis. The bargaining and depression stages can last much longer, even through the first few months of treatment.

Reaching a state of acceptance may take months or even years as you reach a state of relative wellness through your treatment appointments.

## Fear, anxiety, and stress

Fear, anxiety, and stress bubble up to the surface as you cope with the reality of living with HIV. Even after temporarily calming these emotions, they may arise again as you experience side effects from treatment medications or simply move onto the next phase of the care process.

Your commitment to acquiring quality medical care and support from your treatment team can alleviate your concerns, and calm the fear, anxiety, and stress you may feel at any given time.

## **HIV-associated neurocognitive disorders**

HIV treatment medications and the disease progression itself can have a negative impact on your neurocognition function, resulting in difficulties regulating your emotions. You might notice mood swings, irritability, confusion, or memory difficulties as this problem develops through the course of treatment.

Thankfully, you can actively work with your HIV treatment team to reverse these emotional and cognitive issues.

## **Coping strategies**

It is important to prioritize your mental health along with your physical health. Patients often experience anxiety or depression following their diagnosis, but the right coping methods can help you overcome these feelings.

Discuss your feelings with someone you trust. Locking away your emotions is not good for your mental wellbeing, so find the right person who cares and will listen as you speak your mind.

Get enough rest. Your mind and body need to recharge, so take naps and remember to get the right amount of sleep every night. Stay positive and aim to feel better the next day.

Find activities that take your mind off things. You may be encouraged to pursue new or existing hobbies, create a healthy support system, and build a smart sleep schedule. All of these tactics can help you move through treatment without sabotaging your efforts with maladaptive methods of coping.

## CHAPTER 5

# How ARcare Supports You Through HIV Treatments

Starting treatment for HIV soon after a diagnosis is a big part of lowering your risk of complications and protecting your health. At our community health centers in Arkansas, we provide you with the treatment you need along with exceptional support. These two things can help make the treatment process a bit easier for you to go through. We support our patients with HIV in the following ways.

When you have an HIV diagnosis, you should consider treatment as soon as possible. We are your resource to discovering more about your treatment options if you have this disease.

### **Social services**

ARcare offers social services to ensure that patients get the care and support they need. Social services include meeting with registered dietitians to discuss dietary changes,

receiving medication assistance for those who have trouble affording HIV medications, and providing gas vouchers for visits related to your condition.

## **Non-medical case management**

As part of the Ryan White Program, you will receive food voucher assistance, financial help with copays, and referrals for housing for patients with HIV. Other services include applications to receive medical transportation voucher assistance and assistance with AIDS drugs.

Moreover, the Health Resources & Services Administration notes that in 2017, 85.9 percent of this program's clients suppressed the virus, helping them live normal lives.

## **HIV education and risk reduction**

We also provide support in the form of HIV education and information on risk reduction. This education can help you understand this illness better as you go through the treatment process. Understanding risk reduction is also an important part of ensuring that others are not at risk or reassuring loved ones that you are not a risk to them.

## **Support groups**

Support groups provide a space to exchange experiences and comfort regardless of the stage of treatment. Meeting other patients who share your experiences can make it easier

for you to cope with treatments. They show you that you are not alone.

We can help you find HIV support groups you can trust.

## **Medical case management**

As part of the HIV program at ARcare, you can expect to receive medical case management with a registered nurse. These services include intake for the Ryan White Program (parts B, C and D). This program affords you a formal assessment of your needs and help with care plans to ensure that you benefit from the treatment process as much as possible.

## CHAPTER 6

# The Basics of HIV & STD Prevention

From medications to healthy sexual practices and more, preventing the spread of disease is easier for everyone. Use this chapter to discover how you can come into contact with HIV and STDs, how to prevent them, and what to do if you think you have them.

## Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) you should know about

Many diseases and infections spread through sexual contact. Here are the most common ones.

### HIV

HIV causes AIDS, or autoimmune deficiency syndrome. If you think you may have



contracted HIV, then get tested as soon as possible. With quick and daily treatment, HIV may never turn into AIDS.

## **Chlamydia**

This is the most common bacterial STI in the United States. It is easily treatable, but because it sometimes lacks symptoms, the infection can go untreated for years turning into more serious illnesses that lead to infertility.

## **Gonorrhea**

Similar to chlamydia, this infection can lack symptoms and turn into much more serious illnesses. Gonorrhea and chlamydia can occur at the same time.

## **Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)**

Both gonorrhea and chlamydia can turn into PID if you do not treat them. This disease occurs in the upper female reproductive tract and can cause infertility.

## **Human papillomavirus (HPV)**

Researchers have identified more than 100 types of this virus. HPV is another typically silent infection with over half of patients exhibiting no symptoms. HPV has been proven to be responsible for four in five cases of cervical cancer, as well as several other genital

malignancies.

## Genital herpes

Both types (HSV-1, HSV-2) are chronic conditions. Most of the time, the virus is dormant coming in outbreaks that can last a week or more. Herpes is contagious whether or not the patient has any sign of an outbreak.

## Syphilis

This infection can be fatal if you do not treat it. The virus can eventually get into the bloodstream infecting organs outside of the reproductive system.

Depending on your sex, you can experience different symptoms with each disease or no symptoms at all. Many of the diseases listed have no symptoms, so people do not seek treatment. It is important to be tested for STDs regularly to ensure you stay healthy.

## How does HIV spread?

There are four common ways that HIV is spread to another person: by having sex, from a blood transfusion (today the risk of contracting HIV from a transfusion is small), by sharing needles, and from HIV-positive mothers to children during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.

Today, contracting HIV through blood transfusions and pregnancy are low risk. Hospitals and blood banks in the United States thoroughly check donated blood for HIV and other viruses. While infected mothers can still pass on the virus to their babies through pregnancy, delivery, and breastfeeding, the risk is much lower if the mother is being treated for HIV.

## How can I protect myself from HIV and STDs?

You have many preventative measures available to you.

### Using condoms

If used correctly, [male and female condoms](#) can prevent the spread of HIV. However, they provide less protection from STDs like HPV, herpes, and syphilis that spread through skin contact. Moreover, latex condoms have proven most effective in preventing STDs, because plastic breaks more often.

### Taking medications

Federal guidelines recommend that people who have a high risk of contracting HIV take pre-exposure prophylaxis (or PrEP) daily. These medicines can significantly reduce your risk of getting HIV.

Individuals with a high risk of contracting HIV include those in an ongoing relationship

with someone who has HIV, those in non-monogamous relationships, gay/bisexual men who engage in anal sex and have had an STD in the last six months, and heterosexual men or women who do not regularly use condoms with partners of unknown HIV diagnosis who are at substantial risk of HIV infection.

## **Getting tested and knowing your partner's history**

It is important to get tested for HIV and STDs if you are engaging in sexual activity with different partners. Discuss sexual history with your partner, and encourage them to get tested.

## **Limiting your number of sexual partners**

Having more sexual partners increases your chances of getting HIV or other STDs significantly.

## **Not injecting drugs**

Never share your needles or syringes with others no matter how well you know them. If you must inject yourself with medicine, make sure that your equipment is sterilized before and after use.

## Conclusion

We hope this eBook served as a resource that answered the crucial questions you had about HIV. Although HIV poses many difficulties for those who contract it, it is a treatable condition. It is also preventable. If you think you have contracted HIV, then do not delay treatment.

Take action that benefits your health. For more information concerning HIV, its treatment, or its prevention, contact ARcare today at (866) 550-4719 to speak with a healthcare professional.



Whether in times of illness or good health, having a healthcare provider you can trust is an invaluable assurance.

At ARcare, we believe that peace of mind should not be dependant on health insurance.

If you or your family need quality care, regardless of condition or coverage, set up an appointment with ARcare today. Let us help take care of you and your family, so that you can focus on spending time in good health with those you love.

[Book an Appointment](#)

or call 866-550-4719.

