

# Living Well with HIV

HIV is now considered a treatable chronic disease. That means HIV can be managed with medications, similar to diabetes or high blood pressure. Taking HIV medications regularly is an important way to help you live a long, healthy, and productive life. In addition to medications, there is more you can do to live well with HIV!

## Nutrition and Exercise

It is very important that people with HIV maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. This may include eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, drinking lots of water, limiting alcohol use, and getting plenty of sleep. If you need help with nutrition and exercise, the VA MOVE! Program can provide assistance. Visit <https://www.move.va.gov/> to learn more.



## Screenings and Vaccinations

Your provider will recommend certain screenings and vaccinations for other infections. If you haven't already had them, your provider will recommend the following vaccinations: tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Td or TdaP), hepatitis B, pneumococcal (PPSV23 and PCV13), meningococcal, and inactivated influenza vaccination. Your provider may recommend other vaccinations like hepatitis A and HPV. Your provider will also recommend cancer screenings based on your risk factors. It is important to get screenings regularly because there may be increased risk for people with HIV. Your provider may also talk to you about screening for hepatitis C. If you have hepatitis C, treatment is available that can cure the disease for most people.

## Cardiovascular Disease

Adults with HIV are at increased risk for cardiovascular disease. Talk with your provider about what you can do to prevent cardiovascular disease. Maintaining a healthy weight and diet is important. Smoking can also impact cardiovascular disease (see below).

## Smoking and Vaping

Smoking cigarettes is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. And smoking is even worse for people with HIV than it is for people without HIV. Among persons living with HIV, smoking is closely linked with heart disease and serious lung diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and asthma. It also is associated with several of types of cancer. Quitting smoking is a powerful way you can improve your health. VA has resources available to help you quit. Talk to your provider for information, or Text VET to 47848 or visit [smokefree.gov/VET](http://smokefree.gov/VET).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that people consider refraining from using e-cigarette, or vaping, products that contain nicotine. In particular, CDC advises you:

- Should not use e-cigarette, or vaping, products that contain THC.
- Should not buy any type of e-cigarette, or vaping, products, particularly those containing THC, off the street.
- Should not modify or add any substances to e-cigarette, or vaping, products that are not intended by the manufacturer, including products purchased through retail establishments.

For more information about risks associated with vaping, visit the CDC website [www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov).



**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health  
Administration

## Mental Health

Your mental health is a critical component to your overall wellness. If you are experiencing mental health challenges, you are not alone. It is important that you talk with your VA health care provider or someone you trust so that you can receive the care and support you need. If you are in immediate crisis, call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat).

## Protect against STIs

Practicing safer sex (like using condoms) will help you avoid sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like herpes and hepatitis. HIV makes it harder for your body to fight off diseases. What might be a small health problem for someone without HIV could be a big health problem for you. Your provider will screen you for STIs if you have unprotected sex, have new or multiple partners, or think you have been exposed to an STI. If your provider doesn't ask, bring it up at your next appointment. There are vaccinations available for some people at risk, like for human papillomavirus (HPV). You can also ask your VA provider to prescribe you condoms to protect against STIs (there is no cost for Veterans prescribed condoms at VA).



## Protecting Others

Part of living well with HIV is also about protecting others. One of the most effective ways to prevent HIV from passing to an HIV-negative sex partner is to take your own HIV medications (antiretroviral therapy, or ART) every day--these not only protect your health but can prevent transmission of HIV.

Another way to protect others is to talk to your partners about pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP. HIV-negative individuals who are at high risk may, under the supervision of their health care provider, take a medication every day to prevent HIV infection. PrEP is very effective in preventing HIV. The medications used for PrEP are available for people who

use VA for their health care. If you are not eligible for VA health care or have a non-Veteran partner who might need assistance getting PrEP, please see the national Ready, Set, PrEP donation program: [www.getyourprep.com/](http://www.getyourprep.com/)

Assistance with PrEP copays is also available. Learn more: [www.nastad.org/prepcost-resources/prep-assistance-programs](http://www.nastad.org/prepcost-resources/prep-assistance-programs)

## Whole Health

Whole Health is VA's cutting-edge approach to care that supports your health and well-being. Whole Health centers around what matters to you, not what is the matter with you. You can find resources on Whole Health on the VA website: [www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/index.asp](http://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/index.asp).

**For more information on living well with HIV, visit [www.hiv.va.gov](http://www.hiv.va.gov)**