

Having Fearless Conversations With Your Healthcare Provider

It takes courage to overcome that initial fear of having a truly open conversation with your healthcare provider. But sharing details about your health and lifestyle are important, and it's what your healthcare provider wants to hear.

Whether it's about your daily routine and weekend habits, information on other medical conditions, previous treatment experience, or concerns about side effects that may be affecting your body or mind, it's difficult for your healthcare provider to assess the right treatment path for you without knowing the full picture.

TALKING TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER: POSITIVELY FEARLESS CONVERSATION STARTERS

While finding the right treatment is an important part of taking charge of your health, complete care includes prioritizing your physical, social and mental health as well. Self-care looks different for each of us, which is why having open conversations about your treatment plan with your healthcare provider is an important step to taking charge of your health. The below conversation starters are designed to help you bring those fearless conversations into the healthcare provider's office and redefine what living with HIV means for YOU.

“ON A DAILY BASIS I TAKE”

Inform your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins and herbal supplements. These may interact with your HIV medication, causing new side effects or affecting your medication's ability to work. Some medicines cause the amount of HIV medicine in your body to become too low and not control your HIV.

“IN THE PAST I'VE HAD /I'M CURRENTLY DEALING WITH”

Some medical problems may affect the way your healthcare provider will treat your condition. For example, if your body is fighting off other diseases, it may guide your HIV treatment. Be open and courageous about presenting the full picture of your life and journey – including any mental health challenges you have experienced like anxiety, depression or addiction – so your healthcare provider has the full picture of your health and can provide you with the best possible care.

“I HAVE A HARD TIME TAKING MY MEDICATION EXACTLY HOW I'VE BEEN TOLD TO, SHOULD I CONSIDER CHANGING?”

Taking your medication exactly how you've been advised to (for example, at the same time every day) is important to help keep your HIV at an undetectable level. Starting and staying on your medication is an important part of self-care, which is why you should NOT stop taking your HIV medication without talking to your healthcare provider first. If you're having trouble sticking with it, or you're uncomfortable with your treatment regimen, talk to your healthcare provider.

“I THINK MY MEDICATION IS MAKING ME FEEL SICK/SOMETHING DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT”

Different types of medications may affect people differently due to a variety of factors, including age, gender, ethnicity or body type. It's important to be vocal with your healthcare provider about your concerns so you can find a treatment option that's effective, tolerable and supportive of your lifestyle. Talk with your healthcare provider about any side effects you may experience – both physical and mental – and what you can do to manage them. This may mean changing how you take your medications, taking other medications that can help with your side effects, or switching to another HIV medication.

P[+]SITIVELY FEARLESS

“I’VE GAINED WEIGHT RECENTLY. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?”

Maintaining a healthy weight is an important part of overall health. Weight is not about what we look like, it’s about the impact it can have on our bodies. The US Department of Health and Human Services recently updated its HIV treatment guidelines, which also included emerging data around weight gain.

- A certain class of HIV medication may lead to greater weight gain, compared to other classes, especially for those starting treatment for the first time.
- Certain groups are more at risk for gaining weight, including females and Black and Hispanic people living with HIV.
- The medical community is still working to understand the long-term impact and if the weight gain is reversible.

These data are still new and not yet conclusive, so it’s important to have ongoing conversations with your healthcare provider as research continues in this area.¹

“I’M PREGNANT/I’M CONSIDERING GETTING PREGNANT”

Your healthcare provider needs to know this for the health of both you and your baby. Together, you can make decisions about HIV care before, during and after your pregnancy. Medicines may have to be changed before, during and after pregnancy. After delivery, your healthcare provider will discuss what baby formula to use because women living with HIV should NOT breastfeed. This is because HIV can be transmitted through breast milk.

“I DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT THESE LAB TEST RESULTS MEAN”

Your lab test results are more than just numbers. They tell you and your healthcare provider how healthy you are and how well your medicine is working. Ask your healthcare provider to help you understand the results so you know where you stand.

PREPARING FOR SOME QUESTIONS YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER MIGHT ASK YOU

As you prepare for your next fearless conversation, you might want to start thinking about questions your healthcare provider might ask you when evaluating your health and current HIV treatment plan.

- How are you feeling, both physically and mentally?
- How comfortable are you with your current HIV treatment?
- What past medications have you taken/what is your medication history?
- What other medications are you currently taking?
- What side effects are you currently experiencing?
- How long has your current medication helped to keep your HIV undetectable?
- How good are you at sticking to your daily routine?
- How often do you forget to take your medication?
- Is anything preventing you from accessing medication and care?

By partnering with your healthcare provider and having these fearless conversations, you can work together to face every challenge and celebrate every success along your HIV journey.

¹Panel on Antiretroviral Guidelines for Adults and Adolescents. Guidelines for the Use of Antiretroviral Agents in Adults and Adolescents with HIV. Updated January 20, 2022. Accessed May 2022. <https://clinicalinfo.hiv.gov/en/guidelines/adult-and-adolescent-arv>