

HIV

How to navigate your relationship

Finding out that your partner has HIV can lead to a range of emotions, but it's important to know the facts about staying safe. If you're in a new relationship with someone who has HIV or you've recently found out that your longtime partner is HIV positive, you may be experiencing a whirlwind of emotions — possibly fear, sadness, or even anger, depending on the context. You may be concerned that you'll get HIV from your partner or wonder how being with an HIV-positive person will affect your relationship or daily life.



Here are some questions you may have if your partner has HIV, and answers from leading experts on the virus.



1. Will I inevitably get HIV if my partner has it?

No. Methods to prevent HIV transmission when your partner has the virus include Antiretroviral therapy (ART), Condoms, Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and Postexposure prophylaxis (PEP).



2. May I still engage in sexual activity with my partner?

Yes, you may, although it's a good idea to be cautious until you know that your partner's treatment is effectively suppressing the virus. Once it's confirmed that your partner's HIV treatment is suppressing the virus, you don't need to take any other precautions (such as condoms or PrEP) or avoid any sexual acts to avoid getting HIV from that partner.



3. Is there any risk from kissing my partner?

HIV cannot be transmitted through kissing unless both of you have open mouth sores or bleeding gums and you're kissing very heavily.



4. Is it safe to share food, toilets, or toothbrushes?

In most realistic scenarios, HIV cannot be spread by food, skin-on-skin contact, toilets, or sharing a toothbrush. This minuscule risk vanishes if your partner's treatment for HIV is effectively suppressing the virus.



5. What does it mean if my partner's viral load is undetectable?

An undetectable viral load means that your partner's treatment (ART) is so effective at suppressing the virus that lab tests cannot detect its presence. If your partner maintains an undetectable viral load, HIV becomes untransmissible to you! Achieving this is generally the goal of HIV treatment and can be reached through any number of drug regimens.



6. What role do condoms play in HIV prevention?

Condoms are very effective at preventing HIV transmission when used properly, but they generally aren't necessary in a monogamous relationship if your partner's HIV treatment is effective. If your relationship isn't monogamous, it is recommend to use condoms to protect your partner, especially if they don't know you're non-monogamous, because of the STD risk, aside from HIV.



7. Should I take a medicine to help prevent HIV?

PrEP is highly effective at preventing HIV transmission but isn't necessary in a monogamous relationship if your HIV-positive partner is taking their medication as prescribed and has an undetectable viral load.



8. Should I get tested for HIV regularly?

Yes, you should get tested for HIV at regular intervals, according to your doctor's recommendation. Generally, it is recommended to be tested every 3 to 6 months if you engage in sexual activity outside your relationship, or once a year if your relationship is monogamous. HIV screening involves a simple blood draw at a regularly scheduled lab or doctor's appointment.

For someone who has an HIV-positive partner, getting tested regularly is just good preventative healthcare, even though your risk of getting HIV from your partner is essentially zero if their viral load remains undetectable.



9. What can I do to support my partner?

In addition to offering emotional support when it's needed, the most important thing you can do to support your partner is to help them take their medications every day.

Source: By Quinn Phillips Medically Reviewed by Sanjai Sinha, MD Reviewed: June 30, 2020



If you are having trouble disclosing to you partner and thus managing your HIV, you are welcome to contact Platinum Health's EAP Counsellors (010 133 0525) for counselling and support. EAP counsellors are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week!



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