

HIV: YOUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

“ Mental health and mental well-being are fundamental to the quality of life and productivity of individuals, families, communities and nations; enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens. World Health Organisation, 2005

Some studies have shown that one in four of us will experience a serious problem with our mental wellbeing at some point in our lives. Mental health and wellbeing refers to the overall welfare of a person, including their mood, emotion, behaviour and ability to cope with day-to-day living. These are important issues for people living with HIV and can all be affected by the impact of the diagnosis on the person's life.

People living with HIV may experience worry and stress. Finding out that you have HIV can come as a shock and people living with HIV may experience depression, anxiety and face stigma and discrimination. If you are finding it difficult to take your HIV medication then it is important to speak to someone, otherwise your health and wellbeing will be at risk.

Depression and anxiety can affect the way you think, your feelings, behaviour and physical wellbeing. Depressed people may feel sad and worthless, lack confidence have poor concentration sleep badly and in extreme cases have suicidal thoughts. Although depression can affect anyone, research has shown it to be twice as common in people with HIV compared to the general population.

However, depression can be treated and there are different types of treatment for various depressions. The type of treatment you receive will depend on the type of depression you have.

ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT HIV?

Worrying about HIV can be disabling, and often is due to lack of knowledge or fear. If you are worried or have concerns about HIV the best way to ease any fears or anxieties is to talk to someone. If you are worried about HIV and think that you are at risk then get an HIV test. HIV tests and treatment are free and confidential and available at your doctor's surgery, sexual health clinic, GUM (genitourinary medicine) clinic and infectious disease unit in a hospital.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

There are a number of things you can do to improve your emotional health and wellbeing. Talking about your feelings with a loved one or someone close to you can help alleviate any anxieties and stress. It may alternatively be useful to talk to someone impartial. If you are troubled by your thoughts and feelings or if you are finding it difficult to cope then you might want to speak to an appropriate health professional in confidence. If you are unsure about your HIV status then getting a test is the best way to put your mind at rest. >>>

>>> Getting enough sleep and maintaining a healthy diet are important foundations for your emotional health and wellbeing. If you are having difficulties with sleeping or eating then it makes sense to speak to your doctor.

Drink and drugs may offer short term relief when you are finding it difficult to cope but in the long run they are more likely to make your feelings harder to deal with and potentially damage your physical and mental health.

Joining in productive and enjoyable activities can also help promote a feeling of wellbeing such as walking, joining a gym, pursuing hobbies such as swimming, dancing or gardening or joining a support group. Feeling isolated and lonely can be distressing so finding ways of interacting with other people in ways that you feel comfortable with are important to good emotional health and wellbeing.

People who discover that they are HIV positive often experience a range of emotions such as anxiety, guilt, anger or depression. These feelings are natural and do not last forever. Remember you are not alone. There are many things that you can do to help take care of your emotional needs. Here are just a few ideas.

COPIING STRATEGIES

- **Talk about your feelings with your doctor, friends, family members, or other supportive people.**
- **Try to find activities that relieve your stress such as exercise or hobbies.**
- **Try to get enough sleep each night to help you feel rested.**
- **Try to get plenty of exercise.**
- **Learn relaxation methods like meditation, yoga, mindfulness or deep breathing.**
- **Limit the amount of caffeine and nicotine you use.**
- **Remember to take any medication you have been prescribed.**
- **Eat small healthy meals throughout the day.**
- **Try to limit your consumption of alcohol by drinking in moderation and don't take drugs.**
- **Join a support group.**

WHERE TO GET HELP

Talk to your doctor about treatments for depression and what therapy or medicines you might need to take. Below are a list of websites of agencies in Scotland offering support and counselling for people living with HIV.

www.hiv-aids-carers.org.uk

HIV Aids Carers Family Service Providers Scotland.

www.gmh.org.uk

Gay Men's Health – Scotland's charity for Gay Men.

www.tht.org.uk

Terrence Higgins Trust – UK wide charity providing counselling, complimentary therapies and benefits and housing advice.

www.waverleycare.org

Promoting welfare of people living with HIV, including a counselling service.

www.sandyford.org

Sexual Health and Counselling Service for men, women, young people – covering NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. The Steve Retson Project, based at Sandyford, is especially for gay and bisexual men and men who have sex with men.

www.samaritans.org

Samaritans 08457 90 90 90. 24 hour confidential helpline.

www.bacp.co.uk

British Association for Counselling and Psychiatry.

www.samh.org.uk

Scotland Association for Mental Health. Scotland's largest mental health charity providing information and advice relating to mental health.

www.seemescotland.com

Scotland campaign to end stigma and discrimination of mental ill-health.

www.edspace.org.uk

Provides information on mental health including self-help resources and information on services available in Edinburgh.

www.actionondepression.org

Action on Depression is Scotland's national charity working with and for people affected by depression.

