



# LIVING WITH HIV

Becoming infected with HIV can affect many areas of a person's life, including physical health, mental health, and relationships with others. There are many harmful stereotypes associated with the disease. It is important to understand how living with HIV affects people's lives so that we can better support those living with the infection.

## Physical Health

The physical symptoms of HIV vary depending on the point from infection. Flu-like symptoms appear 2-4 weeks from exposure, which may last for a few weeks. Chronic HIV exists in the body after the initial acute infection, and may not display any symptoms. Treatment can help prolong this more mild stage of infection. HIV targets the immune system, so as the disease progresses, the body's defense against other infections weakens.

## Relationships with Others

There is a stigma surrounding an HIV diagnosis, which can affect your relationship with others. It may be illegal to not disclose your HIV status to sexual partners or those who you might be injecting drugs with. For others, it is your decision to share your status. Surrounding yourself with an accepting support system can help alleviate some struggles of the infection.

## Treatment Options

Although there is no cure for HIV, it is possible to control the infection with antiretroviral therapy (ART). ART decreases the amount of the virus in the body by slowing the replication of the virus. Preventing replication allows for the immune system to stay functional, thereby alleviating symptoms of immune deficiency.