



Living well with HIV

To the reader

What is HIV?
How is HIV treated?
What is it like to live with HIV?
Where to find information
and help?

This brochure will tell you
about HIV and what kind of illness it is.

The brochure will also tell you about treatment and
what living with HIV is like.

A list of places that help HIV positive people and their
families is given at the end of the brochure.

The brochure was prepared by Hivpoint and
the HUS Infectious Diseases Clinic.

What does HIV positive mean?

HIV positive refers to a person who has been diagnosed as
being infected with HIV.

Why me?

There are many ways of contracting the HI virus. All HIV
positive people feel differently about the illness.

A person may be shocked upon finding out that they have
HIV.

Some people may be relieved, because now they know for
sure and can start the medication.
All ways of handling such news are right.

The key issue is that people who have HIV do not blame
themselves or their sexual partners. The partner may not
have known about their own HIV infection.

However, the important thing is that all HIV positive people
know for sure that they have the illness. They can then be
given the correct treatment and live a normal life.

If you are worried that you or your sexual partner may have
HIV, talk to a doctor or nurse right away.

What is HIV?

HIV is an illness caused by the HI virus. HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

The HI virus penetrates the body's defence mechanism and begins to destroy it.

Without medication, an HIV positive person's condition would steadily deteriorate.

There is no cure for HIV, but medication can stop it from progressing and worsening.

With medication, an HIV positive person can live a normal life.

And what is AIDS?

If an HIV positive person does not receive medication, the illness will worsen and develop into AIDS.

AIDS is the final stage of HIV. AIDS will lead to a deterioration in the person's condition and eventually death.

Because the HI virus has weakened the body's defence mechanism, the patient can easily develop serious illnesses such as pneumonia or tuberculosis.

HIV medication is often an effective treatment during the early stages of AIDS.



How is HIV transmitted?

It is not easy to get HIV.

You cannot catch HIV from the air

or by touching an infected person.

You cannot get HIV in everyday situations.

A person can contract HIV in the following situations:

- If they have intercourse, without a condom, with a person who has HIV and is not on medication.
- If semen, pre-seminal fluid or vaginal fluid contaminated with HIV gets in their mouth.
- If blood containing the HI virus enters the body through a blood transfusion or organ transplant.
All blood and organs donated in Finland are tested in the hospital.
They do not have the HI virus.
All blood transfusions and organ transplants are safe in Finland.
- If a person uses a needle or syringe with blood containing the HI virus.
- If a mother has HIV, the baby could become infected during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.
The baby will not get HIV if the mother is on HIV medication.

HIV testing

If you are worried that you may have HIV, you should be tested for it immediately.

It is important to know if you have HIV, so that you can start the medication.

Your sexual partner must also be tested for HIV.

The HIV test is a blood test. A blood sample is taken from a fingertip or vein.

The HIV test is free of charge. It is also safe and confidential.

Staff at all healthcare facilities are bound by confidentiality. Doctors and nurses cannot talk to other people about your illness.

HIV tests are performed

- in all healthcare facilities
- Hivpoint
- at Pluspoints of the Finnish Red Cross (SPR)
- in certain offices of the A-Clinic Foundation.

Please remember that the HIV test does not reveal the presence of HIV straight away.

The test can only detect HIV 1–3 months after a person has been infected.



Is there a cure for HIV?

HIV is a chronic illness, which means that there is no cure for it.

HIV medication is the only treatment for HIV.

The medication has to be taken for the rest of the person's life.

HIV medication will only work if you take it regularly and according to the instructions.

HIV medication eliminates the symptoms of HIV.

It stops the illness from progressing.

When an HIV positive person is taking the medication, they cannot transmit the disease to others.

What is HIV treatment like?

HIV is treated with medication.

The treatment includes visits to a doctor and nurse, and laboratory tests.

Doctors monitor the illness regularly.

HIV medication helps the infected person.

Your doctor will tell you about your situation.

How long can people live with HIV?

With medication, HIV positive people can live as long as people without HIV.

Without medication, they can live for around 12 years after being infected.

How much does HIV treatment cost?

In Finland, HIV treatment is free for the patient.

The cost of HIV treatment is around 15,000 euro a year, but if you live in Finland your municipality will pay for this.

What is HIV medication like?

You must never start HIV medication without seeing a doctor.

The doctor will prescribe the medication and give you specific instructions.

HIV medication is an antiviral medicine.

Three different antiviral medicines are used in most cases.

The medication slows the reproduction of the HI virus.

It stops the illness from spreading by protecting healthy cells against HIV infection.

When an HIV positive person is on HIV medication, their immunity and health are strengthened.

They feel better and their condition improves.

The medication must be taken regularly.

Some tablets must be taken with a meal.

If you forget to take the medicine, you should take the missed dose right away.

HIV and other medication

If you have HIV, you should tell the doctor about any other illnesses.

Also tell the doctor about any vitamins and natural remedies you are using.

HIV medication may have an impact on the effectiveness of other medication and vitamins.

It can make the effect of some tablets too strong and make others too weak.

What is it like to live with HIV?

An HIV positive person can live a regular and fulfilling life. HIV does not stop you from living a good, regular life.

HIV positive people can work, study and be socially active. HIV positive people can date, get married and have children.

HIV is not easily transmitted. You cannot pass on HIV in everyday situations.

HIV positive people should lead a healthy lifestyle.

The right lifestyle will help you to stay healthy.

This means getting enough sleep, being physically active, and having a healthy diet.

Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol. Smoking and alcohol are not good for anyone.

Work and studies

HIV positive people can work and study just like everyone else.

It is up to you whether you tell people about your illness at work or school.

You are under no obligation to tell anyone about it.

It is against the law to discriminate against HIV positive people at work.

Employers cannot make you take an HIV test, and having HIV cannot prevent you from getting a new job.

HIV, family and friends

It is up to you whether you tell your family members and friends about your illness.

You must tell your sexual partner about it, but you do not have to tell anyone else.

It is usually best if you tell at least one close person about your HIV.

Talking will help and make you feel better. The person close to you can also support you.

It is important that you are not left alone with your illness.

You can also find support and someone to talk to at Hivpoint.

HIV and children

HIV positive people can start a family just like everyone else.

You should talk to your doctor when you start planning to get pregnant.

If you have children, you can decide whether you want to tell them about HIV.

Think about the child's age and how much they can understand.

Use simple language if you tell a young child.

Every HIV positive person can decide for themselves whether they want to tell their children about HIV.

Some people with HIV prefer not to tell their children about their illness.

However, a child may see HIV medication, for example, and wonder about it.

In many cases, it is good to be open and answer the child's questions.



HIV and healthcare

You should always tell any doctor or dentist you visit that you have HIV.

Doctors and nurses will be better able to treat your other illnesses if they know about your HIV. You should also remember that your HIV medication may affect other medicines.

Some municipalities have specialized dentist clinics for people with HIV.

Although it is more common for people with HIV to be treated in the same place as everyone else.

HIV and residence permits

HIV positive people can be granted a residence permit in Finland.

HIV plays no role in determining residence issues in Finland.

HIV and sex

Everyone is entitled to good and healthy sex; this includes HIV positive people.

Under Finnish law, HIV positive people must tell new sexual partners about their HIV before having sex. A person with HIV must tell new partners about the HIV even when using a condom.

HIV medication will prevent the sexual partner from getting HIV. That is why it is important that you take your medication as instructed.

A condom will also prevent your partner from getting HIV.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY PARTNER AGAINST HIV?

This is how you can protect your partner from HIV

There are many ways of having sex. You can only get HIV from

- unprotected intercourse, which means vaginal intercourse or anal intercourse without a condom
- unprotected oral sex without a condom or oral sex protection. However, the risk during oral sex is small.

You can protect your partner against HIV by:

- 1) *using a condom and oral sex protection*
- 2) *taking your HIV medication regularly*
- 3) *your partner taking preventive medication*



1. Condom

A condom provides effective protection against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases if it is used correctly.

It is important to find a condom that suits you and your partner.

Condoms come in various types and sizes. A condom must be the right size.

If a condom is too big, it can come off easily, and if it is too small it can break easily.

You can buy condoms in supermarkets, pharmacies, kiosks and online stores.

You should use a lubricant with a condom. A lubricant will add pleasure, protects the mucous membranes, and prevents the condom from breaking during sex.

You should use a water-soluble or silicon-based lubricant.

You can buy lubricants in supermarkets, pharmacies and online stores.

How to use a condom

1. Check the expiry date of the condom on the package.



2. Unwrap the condom package. Unroll the condom using your hands.

Do not use your teeth, for example.

Be careful not to rip the condom.

If the condom breaks, take a new one.



3. Pull the foreskin back on the penis. Hold the tip of the condom.

Unroll the condom over the penis all the way down the shaft.

The right direction is the direction in which the condom unrolls most easily.



4. Use a lubricant with the condom.



5. Pull the penis and condom out immediately after ejaculation.

Hold the condom while you are pulling out, to prevent the condom from coming off too soon.

You can only use the condom once.

How to use oral protection

It is important to use protection against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections during oral sex as well. A condom will protect against diseases when the mouth is used to fondle the penis. Oral protection provides protection against sexually transmitted diseases when the mouth is used to fondle the vagina or anus.

Turn a condom into oral protection

1. Cut off the tip of the condom with scissors.
2. Insert the scissors into the hole and cut the whole edge of the condom all the way to the bottom.
3. Open up the condom.
4. Spread the open condom over the vagina or anus during oral sex.

2. Regular use of HIV medication

HIV medication stops the transmission of HIV. HIV positive people will not pass on HIV if they are on effective HIV medication. HIV medication reduces the amount of HI virus in the blood and other fluids so that HIV is not transmitted during sex without a condom.

3. Preventive medication, or PrEP

Preventive medication is available for the partners of HIV positive people. PrEP medication prevents people from getting HIV. The full name of the medication is Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, or PrEP. However, it is not easy to get PrEP medication in Finland, and anyone taking it must be monitored by a doctor. You can ask a doctor about the medication.

Preventive medication after exposure

Despite safety precautions during sex between an HIV positive person and their partner, risk situations can arise.

An example of a risk situation is when an HIV positive person is not on HIV medication and the condom breaks during sex.

In such a situation, the partner can take preventive medication after exposure in order to avoid contracting HIV.

The medication is called Post-Exposure Prophylaxis, or PEP. PEP medication must be taken soon after the risk situation. This means within 48-72 hours at the latest.

PEP medication is free of charge and is administered by an infectious diseases specialist. If you need PEP medication, you must contact a doctor.

See the Hivpoint website for further details.

GLOSSARY

Risk situation

A risk situation is a situation in which it is possible to contract HIV.

An example of a risk situation is a condom breaking during sex.

Sexually transmitted infection

An infection that you can get from having sexual intercourse without a condom or oral sex without oral sex protection.

Rapid test

A rapid test is a test for HIV that provides the answer quickly, usually within 1-20 minutes.

A rapid test can be done 3 months after potential exposure to HIV.

Antiretroviral medication

Medication that is used to treat HIV.

Such medication is antiretroviral therapy, or antiviral medicine.

In most cases, three antiviral medicines are used to treat HIV.

Viral load

The HI virus viral load indicates the amount of HI virus per millilitre in person's blood.

Antibodies

When a person gets HIV, they start producing antibodies against the HI virus.

The HIV test reveals which antibodies are in the blood.

CD4 cell or T4 cell, or a helper cell

Normally, this cell keeps a person's body in good condition.

The HI virus destroys these cells.

WHERE TO FIND HELP AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Hivpoint

Hivpoint helps people everywhere in Finland.

At Hivpoint, you can speak Finnish or English.

You can also ask for an interpreter.

All Hivpoint help is free of charge, anonymous and confidential.

Hivpoint provides help to:

- HIV positive people
- families and friends of HIV positive people
- people who worry about HIV.

Hivpoint services include:

- HIV rapid testing
- telephone counselling
- online chat counselling at hivpoint.fi
- internet counselling
- sexual counselling in all matters related to sex
- peer support
- weekend courses for people living with HIV.

Peer support means talking to a person in the same situation – talking to another HIV positive person.

You can make an appointment for support counselling at Hivpoint.

You can participate in a peer support group with other HIV positive people.

Adaptation training courses are a source of information and help for people who are new to HIV.

On the course, you will meet other HIV positive people and their families and friends.



Hivpoint contact information

Hivpoint telephone counselling:

Telephone number 0207 465 705.

You can call on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday at 10–15.30.

Information and counselling on the internet at:
www.hivpoint.fi

Hivpoint has offices in Helsinki, Tampere and Oulu.
You can find the addresses of the Hivpoint offices at the end of this brochure.

Other places that help people living with HIV:

HIV Finland

HIV Finland (Positiiviset ry) is an association that offers peer support to people with HIV and AIDS and to their families.

Positiiviset ry is also engaged in lobbying for patient rights.

The phone number of Positiiviset ry is 09 692 5441.

The website of Positiiviset ry is at www.positiiviset.fi

Finnish Red Cross (SPR)

The Finnish Red Cross (SPR) provides telephone counselling.

You can call SPR telephone counselling on 0203 27000 on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 17–20.



Contact information

HELSINKI
Unioninkatu 45 K,
00170 Helsinki

TAMPERE
Nalkalankatu 12 F,
33200 Tampere

OULU
Kumppanuuskeskus
Kansankatu 53,
90100 Oulu

Hivpoint counseling:
tel. 0207 465 705
(Mon-Thu at 10–15.30)
Online chat
(every Monday at 10-15:30)
www.hivpoint.fi