

# WOMEN AND HIV/AIDS

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



### WHAT IS HIV/AIDS?

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is caused by the virus called HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). HIV attacks the immune system, reducing one's ability to fight infections. Approximately 65,000 Canadians are living with HIV/AIDS. Presently young women are the highest rising group of newly diagnosed cases worldwide.

### IS THERE A CURE FOR HIV/AIDS?

**There is no cure**, but there are many medications that can help prolong and enhance life. This fact sheet has been created to assist women in learning more about the resources and support services available to you. Knowing the facts will assist you in making informed choices about your health.

### HOW DO WOMEN GET HIV?

The most common ways for women to become exposed to HIV are:

1. Having sex without a condom ~ vaginal or anal.
2. Sharing needles to inject drugs.

### **THE ONLY WAY OF KNOWING WHETHER YOU HAVE HIV IS BY HAVING A BLOOD TEST.**

There are three types of HIV testing available:

1. **Anonymous testing** (no name) can only be done at certain places. In Nova Scotia the Halifax Centre for Sexual Health provides anonymous testing. That means you don't need to give your name, address or health care number. Individual concerns are addressed within an open discussion of sexual health. The Centres' number is 455-9656.
2. **Nominal Testing** Your name will appear on the test form and the test result. The test result will be made available to your doctor or health care provider and entered in your Medical Record. The test result will be reported to the Public Health authorities.
3. **Non-nominal Testing** (using a code) is done by a doctor. Your name is not used, only a code. You and your doctor are the only people who know the code. The doctor will know the results and record it in your medical chart.

### **YOU HAVE TO ASK FOR AN HIV TEST, AND AGREE TO IT BEFORE THE TEST CAN BE DONE.**

Having an HIV test is a big decision. **Talk to an HIV counsellor before you decide to get tested so that you are better informed.** You may want to bring a trusted friend or family member with you when you go for the test and when you get the results.

### HIV and Women

- Prior to 1998, women accounted for only 12% of positive test results
- 2007-45% - Proportion of positive HIV tests among women attributed to Aboriginal Women, who represent 4% of the total Canadian female population.
- 2007-20% - Proportion of positive HIV tests among women attributed to African Canadian women who represent a little more than 2% of women in Canada
- 2008—26% - Proportion of new HIV cases attributed to women.
- 2008-58.3% - Proportion of positive test reports among women attributed to the age category 15-19 years.

**It is hard to talk openly about HIV. Many people believe that if you have HIV, you must have done something wrong. Some of us may have sex with only one person and believe this will keep us safe. Some of us may think that only men who have sex with other men get HIV.**

**we're here to help!**

The **Northern Healthy Connections Society (NHCS)** serves northern Nova Scotians living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS as well as those most at risk. We offer one-on-one sessions, referrals to specialists, assistance with travel to appointments with doctors and has support groups for both PHAs (Persons Having AIDS) and their families/friends. NHCS's office is located in Truro and has an extensive Resource Library, in addition to an internet connection for those wanting to access treatment and educational resources online.

**For more information call 895-0931 or toll free 1-866-940-2437**

**We're located at:**

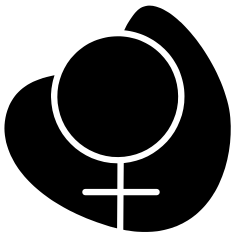
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# If you have HIV ~ Some things you need to know...

## Things You Can Do to Stay Healthy

- Drink plenty of water
- Get plenty of rest
- Take your medication at prescribed times (adherence is crucial)
- Eat healthy foods and exercise regularly
- Avoid alcohol (it can affect the way your medications work)
- Practice safer sex as other STIs can weaken your immune system as well as cause drug resistance concerns
- Monitor your menstrual periods
- Monitor yeast infections as they are common, so take care and talk to your doctor
- Pap test every 6 months
- Practice safer needle use

## Stay ahead of the situation....Keep Informed!

- Take an active role in your treatment (be a part of the decision making and learn what you can)
- Search out an HIV friendly physician
- Know what types of symptoms to expect (changes in body fat, sleep disruptions, diarrhoea, tingling in hands and feet, headaches, nausea, etc.)
- Learn about where you can access mental health services
- Have open communication with your health care team.
- Educate yourself about non-traditional therapies
- Stay informed about new treatments
- Keep a journal—tracking charts
- Maintain written history of medications
- Make a list of things you want to discuss with your doctor

## LEARN THE LINGO (Some Terms You Might Need to Know)

**Adherence**—Taking medication at the specified times as prescribed

**Cocktail**—Refers to a combination of medication or therapy, usually three or more different drugs

**Lipoatrophy**—a change in body fat distribution that may affect your appearance. Lipoatrophy is a decrease in body fat, usually resulting in loss of weight around the face, arms and legs

**Lipodystrophy**—a change in body fat distribution that may affect your appearance. Lipodystrophy is an increase in body fat, usually affecting the stomach, breasts and back of the shoulders

**Non-Adherence**—missing doses, taking the incorrect amount or not following prescribed instructions such as taking medication with food or on an empty stomach if instructed to do so

**Opportunistic Infections**—these are caused by bacterial, fungi and other viruses and usually affect HIV+ persons because their immune system is weaker or compromised

**T-Cell Count**—this term is used when you get your blood results back. The T-cells are the white blood cells that HIV attacks. These cells play an important role in controlling infections. The higher your T-cell count, the better. The T-cells are the fighters in the army of your immune system

**Toxicities**—toxins which sometimes cause side effects from your medication or other concerns

**Viral Load**—the term refers to the amount of virus in your blood; the lower your viral load the better. You will also hear the term undetectable used when your viral load is below 50 this does not mean that you are virus free.

## EXCELLENT READING—AVAILABLE AT NHCS...

**Managing Your Health**—A guide for people living with HIV/AIDS providing reliable information in plain language delivered from the perspectives of persons living with HIV/AIDS.

**HAART**—A practical guide to highly active antiretroviral therapy.

**Complimentary Therapies**—a guide to complimentary therapies for people living with HIV that offers ideas for a holistic approach to your health.

**A Practical Guide to Nutrition**—Nutrition is in your hands this book explains good nutrition and how it can keep you healthy and decrease your chances of getting other chronic diseases.

**Herbal Therapy**—Herbal therapies have been used since ancient times this book offers a wealth of information on herbal therapies and how they can be used to enhance your health.

