

YOUR CARE POLMED

November 2020



How to support someone who is newly diagnosed with HIV



In South Africa, **7.7 million people are living with HIV**. HIV prevalence among the general adult population is at **20.4%**, which affirms the need for continued awareness and support for those living with the condition.

Supporting someone with HIV

People living with HIV need our understanding, love and support. Here are a few ways we can help.



1. Talk about it

If a loved one shares their HIV status with you, acknowledge their diagnosis with empathy. If they feel comfortable enough with the communication, ask questions about their condition, such as how they are feeling and their treatment plans. Avoid making any inappropriate remarks that include "how did you get it?" and "why didn't you use a condom?"

Create an environment where a loved one with HIV can feel comfortable enough to have an open and honest conversation about their diagnosis.



2. Encourage treatment

The life expectancy of South Africans living with HIV increased from 56 years in 2010 to 63 years in 2018, due to greater access to and the affordability of antiretroviral drugs.

Some people who are recently diagnosed may find it hard to take that first step to HIV treatment. By getting linked to HIV medical care early, starting antiretroviral therapy, adhering to medication, and staying in care, people with HIV can keep the virus under control, and prevent their HIV infection from progressing to AIDS.

Offer to accompany them to the doctor or help them create a medication schedule. Once on treatment, it's important for people living with HIV to take their HIV medication every day, precisely as prescribed. Ask your loved one what you can do to support them in establishing a medication routine and sticking to it.



3. Educate yourself

Educate yourself about HIV: what it is, how it is transmitted, how it is treated, and how people can stay healthy while living with HIV. Having a solid understanding of HIV is a big step forward in supporting your loved one, but keep in mind that they may not want the information right away.



4. Reassure them

Let the person know, through your words or actions, that their HIV status does not change your relationship and that you will keep this information private if they want you to.



5. Be there for them

They may want to connect with you in the same ways they did before being diagnosed. Do things you did together before their diagnosis; talk about things you talked about before their diagnosis. Show them that you see them as the same person and that they are more than their diagnosis. Depression and suicide rates are high among those living with HIV, so be attuned to this and watch out for any warning signs.



References

- <https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/sub-saharan-africa/south-africa>
- <https://sajp.org.za/index.php/sajp/article/view/1175/1454>
- http://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=748:hiv-aids-depression-and-suicide&catid=92&Itemid=154
- <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/316056>
- https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=ZAF