

Mental Health and HIV

(updated May 2021)



Mental Health and HIV

This education packet is a curated compilation of resources about mental health and HIV.

The contents of this packet are listed below:

- [Mental Health and HIV \(HIV.gov\)](#)
- [HIV and Mental Health \(HIVinfo\)](#)
- [El VIH y la Salud Mental \(HIVinfo\)](#)
- [HIV/AIDS and Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#)
- [Stigma and Mental Health \(CDC\)](#)
- [El Estigma y Salud Mental \(CDC\)](#)

You may wish to customize this packet to meet the needs or interests of particular groups, such as event participants, providers, patients, clients, or the general public. So please feel free to distribute all or part of this document as either a printout or PDF.

Mental Health

 hiv.gov/hiv-basics/staying-in-hiv-care/other-related-health-issues/mental-health

March 19, 2020

Mental Health and HIV

Almost every person faces mental health challenges at some point. Major stresses—like the death of a loved one, divorce, loss of a job, or moving—can have a major impact on mental health. Having a serious illness, like HIV, can be another source of major stress. You may find that a diagnosis of HIV challenges your sense of well-being or complicates existing mental health conditions. HIV and some opportunistic infections can also affect your nervous system and can lead to changes in your behavior.

Good mental health will help you live your life to the fullest and is essential to successfully treating HIV. To help manage your mental health, it is important to know when, how, and where to get help. Many mental health conditions are treatable and many people with mental health conditions recover completely.

One of the most common mental health conditions that people living with HIV face is depression. Depression can range from mild to severe, and the symptoms of depression can affect your day-to-day life. Both HIV-related medical conditions and HIV medications can contribute to depression.

Symptoms can include:

- Feeling sad or anxious often or all the time
- Not wanting to do activities that used to be fun
- Feeling irritable, easily frustrated, or restless
- Having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Waking up too early or sleeping too much
- Eating more or less than usual or having no appetite
- Experiencing aches, pains, headaches, or stomach problems that do not improve with treatment
- Having trouble concentrating, remembering details, or making decisions
- Feeling tired, even after sleeping well
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Thinking about suicide or hurting yourself

Other mental health conditions include anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and personality disorders. For a good description of specific mental health conditions and their symptoms, visit mentalhealth.gov.

Getting help in a crisis. At times, the problems of life can take a toll on people. Some might feel trapped, hopeless, or might wonder what they have to live for. If you are having thoughts like these or are thinking about hurting or killing yourself, know that you are not alone and that things can change. [SAMHSA's Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress. [Get information online](#) or call:(800) 273-TALK (8255). You can also:

- Call your HIV health care provider.
- Get help from another health care provider.
- Reach out to a close friend or loved one.
- Contact a minister, spiritual leader, or someone else in your faith community.

Talk to Your HIV Health Care Provider

Talk to your HIV health care provider if you are experiencing any of the symptoms above. Your provider may ask you some questions to assess how you are feeling and may prescribe medications to help with depression or anxiety or refer you to a mental health specialist.

If you are taking antiretroviral therapy (ART) or plan to take ART, consider the following:

- Sometimes ART can relieve your anxiety because knowing you are taking care of yourself can give you a sense of securing.
- However, some antiretroviral medications may cause symptoms of depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbance, and may make some mental health issues worse. Talk to your health care provider to better understand how your HIV treatment might affect your mental health and if anything can be done to address the side effects.
- Also, some medicines for mental health conditions or mood disorders can interact with ART.

Communicate openly and honestly with your health care provider about your mental health so that he or she can help you find the support you need. Discuss any changes in the way you are thinking, or how you are feeling about yourself and life in general.

Mental Health Providers and Programs

Because mental health conditions are common, many outlets can help you maintain good mental health. If you are having symptoms of depression or another mental health condition, talk to your health care provider, social worker, or case manager. These people can refer you to a mental health provider who can give you the care you need.

Types of mental health providers include:

- **Psychiatrists:** Medically trained physicians who treat mental health problems with various therapies, like talk therapy, and by prescribing medicine.

- Psychologists: Trained professionals who help people cope with life challenges and mental health problems with therapies, like talk therapy, but usually cannot prescribe medicines.
- Therapists: Mental health or marriage and family counselors who help people cope with life issues and mental health problems.

You may also choose to join a support group. Support groups include:

- Mental health support groups: An organized group of peers who meet in a safe and supportive environment to provide mental health support to members of the group.
- HIV support groups: An organized group of peers living with HIV who meet in a safe and supportive environment to provide support to other people living with HIV.

Work with a trained mental health professional to learn about treatment options such as therapy and/or medicine. You and your provider can develop a plan that will help you regain and maintain good mental health.

Other ways to help improve mental health and well-being include:

- Exercise: Regular [exercise may help improve symptoms of depression](#) and decrease stress. When you exercise, your brain releases chemicals called endorphins. These chemicals help improve your mood.
- Meditation: [Recent studies](#) suggest that mindfulness meditation can help ease depression, anxiety, and stress.

You may find it helpful to create an action plan for your mental well-being. SAMHSA offers a [free self-help guide](#) you can use to create and maintain a wellness plan for yourself.

Find Mental Health Services

Many organizations have websites and telephone hotlines that can help you find treatment for mental health conditions.

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)'s [Find Help](#) website provides a list of organizations and contact numbers that can help you find mental health treatment and support in your local area.

Content Source: [HIV.gov](#)

Date last updated: March 19, 2020

HIV and Mental Health

 hivinfo.nih.gov/understanding-hiv/fact-sheets/hiv-and-mental-health

Living with HIV

Last Reviewed: September 24, 2020

Key Points

- Mental health refers to a person's overall emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Good mental health helps people make healthy choices, reach personal goals, develop healthy relationships, and cope with stress.
- If you have HIV, it's important to take care of both your physical health and your mental health.
- People with HIV have a higher risk for some mental health conditions than people who do not have HIV.
- Mental health conditions are treatable, and people with mental health problems can recover.

What is mental health?

Mental health refers to a person's overall emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Mental health affects how people think, feel, and act. Good mental health helps people make healthy choices, reach personal goals, develop healthy relationships, and cope with stress.

Poor mental health is not the same as mental illness. Mental illnesses include many different conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. A person can have poor mental health and not have a diagnosed mental illness. Likewise, a person with a mental illness can still enjoy mental well-being.

If you are living with HIV, it's important to take care of both your physical health and your mental health.

Are people with HIV at risk for mental health conditions?

Anyone can have mental health problems. Mental health conditions are common in the United States. According to [MentalHealth.gov](https://www.mentalhealth.gov/), in 2014, about one in five American adults experienced a mental health issue.

However, people with HIV have a higher risk for some mental health conditions than people who do not have HIV. For example, people living with HIV are twice as likely to have depression as people who do not have HIV.

It's important to remember that mental health conditions are treatable and that people who have mental health problems can recover.

What can cause mental health problems?

The following factors can increase the risk of mental health problems:

- Major life changes, such as the death of a loved one or the loss of a job
- Negative life experiences, such as abuse or trauma
- Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- A family history of mental health problems

The stress of having a serious medical illness or condition, like HIV, may also negatively affect a person's mental health. HIV infection and related opportunistic infections can affect the brain and the rest of the nervous system. This may lead to changes in how a person thinks and behaves. In addition, some medicines used to treat HIV may have side effects that affect a person's mental health.

What are the warning signs of a mental health problem?

Changes in how a person feels or acts can be a warning sign of a mental health problem. For example, potential signs of depression include:

- Losing interest in activities that are usually enjoyable
- Experiencing persistent sadness or feeling empty
- Feeling anxious or stressed
- Having suicidal thoughts

If you have any signs of a mental health problem, it's important to get help.

What should I do if I need help for a mental health problem?

Talk to your health care provider about how you are feeling. Tell them if you are having any problems with drugs or alcohol.

Your health care provider will consider whether any of your HIV medicines may be affecting your mental health. They can also help you find a mental health care provider, such as a psychiatrist or therapist.


Here are additional ways to improve your mental health:

- Join a support group.
- Try meditation, yoga, or deep breathing to relax.

- Get enough sleep, eat healthy meals, and stay physically active.

Provided in collaboration with NIH's Office of Aids Research.

El VIH y la salud mental

 hivinfo.nih.gov/es/understanding-hiv/fact-sheets/el-vih-y-la-salud-mental

Vivir con el VIH

Última revisión: October 6, 2020

Puntos importantes

- La salud mental se refiere al bienestar emocional, psicológico y social general de una persona. La buena salud mental ayuda a las personas a tomar decisiones saludables, lograr metas personales, desarrollar relaciones saludables y sobrellevar el estrés.
- Si usted tiene el VIH, es importante que cuide tanto de su salud física como de su salud mental.
- Las personas con el VIH corren un mayor riesgo de padecer algunas enfermedades de salud mental que las personas que no tienen el virus.
- Los problemas de salud mental se pueden tratar y las personas con estos tipos de problemas se pueden recuperar.

¿Qué es la salud mental?

La salud mental se refiere al bienestar emocional, psicológico y social general de una persona. La salud mental afecta la forma en que las personas piensan, sienten y actúan. La buena salud mental ayuda a las personas a tomar decisiones saludables, lograr metas personales, desarrollar relaciones saludables y sobrellevar el estrés.

La mala salud mental no es lo mismo que la enfermedad mental. Las enfermedades mentales incluyen muchas afecciones diferentes, por ejemplo, trastorno por estrés postraumático (TEPT), trastorno bipolar y esquizofrenia. Una persona puede tener mala salud mental y no tener una enfermedad mental diagnosticada. Del mismo modo, una persona con una enfermedad mental todavía puede disfrutar del bienestar mental.

Si usted tiene el VIH, es importante que cuide tanto de su salud física como de su salud mental.

¿Corren las personas con el VIH el riesgo de experimentar problemas de salud mental?

Cualquier persona puede tener problemas de salud mental. Los problemas de salud mental son comunes en los Estados Unidos. De acuerdo a MentalHealth.gov, en el 2014, aproximadamente uno de cada cinco adultos en los Estados Unidos experimentó un problema de salud mental.

Sin embargo, las personas con el VIH corren un mayor riesgo de padecer algunas enfermedades de salud mental que las personas que no tienen el virus. Por ejemplo, las personas con el VIH tienen el doble de probabilidad de sufrir de depresión que las personas que no lo tienen.

Es importante recordar que los problemas de la salud mental se pueden tratar y las personas que los tienen se pueden recuperar.

¿Qué puede causar problemas de salud mental?

Los siguientes factores pueden aumentar el riesgo de problemas de salud mental:

- Cambios importantes en la vida, como la muerte de un ser querido o la pérdida de un empleo
- Experiencias de vida negativas, como abuso o trauma
- Factores biológicos que afectan los genes o la química cerebral
- Antecedentes familiares de problemas de salud mental

El estrés de tener una enfermedad o afección médica grave, como el VIH, puede afectar negativamente la salud mental de una persona. La infección por el VIH y las infecciones oportunistas afines pueden afectar el cerebro y el sistema nervioso. Esto puede causar cambios en la forma en que una persona piensa y se comporta. Además, algunos medicamentos que se usan para tratar el VIH podrían tener efectos secundarios que afectan la salud mental de una persona.

¿Cuáles son las señales de alerta de un problema de salud mental?

Los cambios en cómo se siente o actúa una persona pueden ser una señal de alerta de un problema de salud mental. Por ejemplo, entre las posibles señales de depresión se incluyen:

- Perder el interés en actividades que suelen ser agradables
- Sentir una tristeza persistente o sensación de vacío
- Sentir ansiedad o estrés
- Tener pensamientos suicidas

Si tiene alguna señal de un problema de salud mental, es importante buscar ayuda.

¿Qué debo hacer si necesito ayuda para un problema de salud mental?

Hable con su proveedor de atención médica sobre cómo se siente. Cuénteles si está teniendo problemas con el alcohol o las drogas.

El proveedor de atención médica determinará si alguno de sus medicamentos contra el VIH podrían estar afectando su salud mental. También puede ayudarle a encontrar un proveedor de atención de salud mental como un psiquiatra o terapeuta.

He aquí otras formas de mejorar su salud mental:

- Únase a un grupo de apoyo.
- Pruebe la meditación, el yoga o la respiración profunda para relajarse.
- Duerma lo suficiente, coma alimentos saludables y manténgase físicamente activo.

Proporcionado en colaboración con la Oficina de Investigación del SIDA de los NIH

HIV/AIDS and Mental Health

 nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/hiv-aids

Overview

HIV, or human immunodeficiency virus, is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) and can be transmitted during sexual intercourse; by sharing syringes; or perinatally during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.

HIV weakens the immune system by destroying CD4 positive (CD4+) T cells, a type of white blood cell that is important for fighting off infections. The loss of these cells means that people living with HIV are more vulnerable to other infections and diseases.

People living with HIV may be diagnosed with AIDS when they have one or more *opportunistic infections* (infections that occur because HIV weakens the immune system), such as pneumonia or tuberculosis, and have a very low number of CD4+ T cells (less than 200 cells per cubic millimeter of blood). For more information on HIV/AIDS, please visit the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) [HIV/AIDS webpage](#).

People living with HIV/AIDS are at a higher risk for mental disorders.

The stress associated with living with a serious illness or condition, such as HIV, can affect a person's mental health. It is important for people living with HIV to know that they have a higher chance of developing mood, anxiety, and cognitive disorders. For example, depression is one of the most common mental health conditions faced by people living with HIV. It is important to remember that mental disorders are treatable. People who have a mental disorder can recover completely.

Situations that can contribute to mental health problems for people living with HIV include:

- Having trouble getting mental health services
- Experiencing a loss of social support, resulting in isolation
- Experiencing a loss of employment or worries about being able to perform at work
- Having to tell others about an HIV diagnosis
- Managing HIV medicines and medical treatment
- Dealing with loss, including the loss of relationships or the death of loved ones
- Facing stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS

HIV and related infections can also affect the brain and the rest of the nervous system. This may change how a person thinks and behaves. Also, some medications used to treat HIV may have side effects that affect a person's mental health.

Understanding how living with HIV can affect mental health and knowing what resources are available can make it easier for people to manage their overall health and well-being.

Central Nervous System Disease Associated with HIV

HIV causes significant inflammation in the body. This inflammation can cause neurological complications by damaging the spinal cord and brain, which make up the central nervous system.

Antiretroviral therapy (ART), a combination of HIV medications taken daily, helps stop HIV from replicating and spreading in the body. Despite effective ART, people living with HIV are still at risk for central nervous system diseases associated with HIV. These diseases can be neurological (affecting the nervous system) or neurocognitive (affecting cognition or mental processing).

Severe neurological impairments such as dementia, brain atrophy, and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) are less common in people who use ART, compared to people living with HIV who are not on ART. However, there are still less severe forms of central nervous system diseases associated with HIV.

Researchers are working to better understand how HIV affects the central nervous system; this information will be helpful to develop new treatments to improve the lives of people living with HIV. Understanding which types of cells in the central nervous system are targeted by the HIV infection and how those cells are damaged may help shape efforts to prevent, treat, and cure HIV. Research efforts also focus on understanding why HIV is harder to eliminate in some tissues in the body and what strategies might be more effective on those cells.

HIV Treatments and Therapies

Research shows that HIV treatment should begin as soon as possible after diagnosis to achieve the best health outcomes. HIV treatment usually includes a combination of medicines called antiretroviral therapy (ART). Following a treatment plan, such as taking the medications prescribed by a health care provider, is critical for controlling and suppressing the virus. Following the treatment plan can be difficult, but there are strategies that can help. For more information and helpful tips, see the HIV.gov page on [Taking Medication Every Day](#).

Starting ART also can affect mental health in different ways. Sometimes ART can help to relieve anxiety because knowing that you are taking care of yourself can provide a sense of security. However, coping with the reality of living with a chronic illness like HIV can be challenging. In addition, some antiretroviral medicines may cause symptoms of depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbance and may make some mental health issues worse.

For these reasons, it is important for people living with HIV to talk to their health care provider about their mental health. A conversation about mental health should be part of a complete medical evaluation before starting ART, and discussions about mental health should continue throughout treatment.

People living with HIV should be open and honest with their provider about any changes in their mental health, such as thinking or how they feel about themselves and life in general. People living with HIV should also discuss any alcohol or substance use with their provider. For more information, see the HIV.gov pages on [Mental Health and HIV](#) and [Alcohol and Drug Use](#).

People living with HIV should also tell their health care provider about any over-the-counter or prescribed medications they may be taking, including [any psychiatric medicines](#), because some of these drugs may interact with antiretroviral medications. Learn how to get the conversation started with [Tips for Talking with Your Health Care Provider](#).

Join a Study

Clinical trials are research studies that look at new ways to prevent, detect, or treat diseases and conditions. The goal of clinical trials is to determine if a new test or treatment works and is safe. Although individuals may benefit from being part of a clinical trial, participants should be aware that the primary purpose of a clinical trial is to gain new scientific knowledge so that others may be better helped in the future.

Researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and around the country conduct many studies with patients and healthy volunteers. We have new and better treatment options today because of what clinical trials uncovered years ago. Be part of tomorrow's medical breakthroughs. Talk to your health care provider about clinical trials, their benefits and risks, and whether one is right for you.

To learn more or find a study, visit:

- [NIMH's Clinical Trials webpage](#): Information about participating in clinical trials
- [ClinicalTrials.gov: HIV/AIDS and Depression](#): List of clinical trials funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) being conducted across the country
- [Join a Study: Adults - HIV/AIDS Issues](#): List of studies being conducted on the NIH Campus in Bethesda, MD

Learn More

Federal Resources

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [HIV Basics](#)**
- **HIV.gov: [Mental Health and HIV](#)**

- HIV.gov: [HIV Basics](#)
- HIVinfo.NIH.gov: [HIV and Mental Health](#)
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases: [HIV/AIDS](#)
- National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Stroke: [Neurological Complications of AIDS](#)

Free Brochures

- **Depression Basics**: This brochure explains what depression is and how to get help.
- **Chronic Illness & Mental Health**: This brochure discusses chronic illnesses and depression, including symptoms, health effects, treatment, and recovery.
- **Tips for Talking with Your Health Care Provider**: This fact sheet offers tips to help people start a conversation with their mental health care provider about issues related to mental health.

Research and Statistics

Last Revised: November 2020

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Stigma and Mental Health

 [cdc.gov/hiv/basics/livingwithhiv/mental-health.html](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/livingwithhiv/mental-health.html)

How can I deal with HIV stigma and discrimination?

Learn about [HIV stigma and discrimination](#) and view [stories](#) of people who have overcome HIV stigma.

How can HIV affect my mental health?

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Having HIV can be a source of major stress.

- HIV may challenge your sense of well-being or complicate existing mental health conditions.
- HIV, and some opportunistic infections, can also affect your nervous system and can lead to changes in your behavior.

Good mental health will help you live your life to the fullest and is essential to successfully treating HIV.

HIV and Depression

One of the most common mental health conditions that people with HIV face is [depression](#).

What are the symptoms of depression?



Symptoms of depression that can affect your day-to-day life include

- Persistent sadness,
- Anxiety,
- Feeling “empty,”
- Feelings of helplessness,
- Negativity,
- Loss of appetite, and
- Disinterest in engaging with others.

To help manage your mental health, it is important to know when, how, and where to get help. If you need help finding treatment

- use [SAMHSA's Treatment Locator](#), or
- call the national helpline at 1-800-662-HELP.

Depression can be Treated



Ask your health care provider, social worker, or case manager about local support groups. They may also refer you to a mental health provider who can give you the care you need:

- **Psychiatrists** treat mental health problems with various therapies, like talk therapy, and by prescribing medicine.
- **Psychologists** help people cope with life challenges and mental health problems with therapies, like talk therapy. Psychologists usually cannot prescribe medicine.

- **Therapists** are mental health or marriage and family counselors. They help people cope with life issues and mental health problems.

Page last reviewed: October 21, 2020

Salud mental

 [cdc.gov/hiv/spanish/basics/livingwithhiv/mental-health.html](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/spanish/basics/livingwithhiv/mental-health.html)



EL ESTIGMA Y SALUD MENTAL

¿Cómo puedo afrontar el estigma y la discriminación por el VIH?

Obtenga información sobre [el estigma y la discriminación por el VIH](#) y vea las [historias](#) de personas que superaron el estigma.

¿De qué manera puede afectar el VIH mi salud mental?

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Tener el VIH puede ser una fuente de mucho estrés.

- El VIH podría poner a prueba su sensación de bienestar o complicar las afecciones de salud mental ya existentes.
- El VIH, y algunas infecciones oportunistas, pueden también afectar el sistema nervioso y provocar cambios en el comportamiento de las personas.

Tener buena salud mental lo ayudará a vivir plenamente y es esencial para tratar exitosamente la infección por el VIH.

El VIH y la depresión

Una de las afecciones de salud mental más comunes que afrontan las personas con el VIH es la [depresión](#).

¿Cuáles son los síntomas de depresión?



Los síntomas de depresión que pueden afectar la vida diaria incluyen:

- tristeza persistente,
- ansiedad,
- sensación de “vacío”,
- sensación de impotencia,
- negativismo,
- pérdida del apetito,
- desinterés por interactuar con los demás.

Para ayudar a manejar la salud mental es importante saber cuándo, cómo y dónde obtener ayuda. Si necesita ayuda para encontrar tratamiento llame a la línea nacional de ayuda 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357).

La depresión se puede tratar



Pregúntele a su proveedor de atención médica, trabajador social o administrador de casos si pueden remitirlo a un grupo de apoyo local. Es posible que también lo remitan a un proveedor de salud mental que pueda brindarle los cuidados que necesita:

- Los **siquiatras** tratan los problemas de salud mental usando distintos tipos de terapia como, por ejemplo, terapia hablada, y recetando medicamentos.

- Los **sicólogos** ayudan a las personas a sobrellevar los desafíos de la vida y los problemas de salud mental con terapias, como terapia hablada. Por lo general, los sicólogos no pueden recetar medicamentos.
- Los **terapeutas** son consejeros de salud mental, matrimoniales o de familia. Ayudan a las personas a sobrellevar los problemas de la vida y de salud mental.