

Patient Handout – Immunodeficiency Clinic PGIMER, Chandigarh

The following information is intended to supplement, not substitute for, the expertise and judgment of your physician. It is based on the kind of information given to patients who use this medication in other parts of the world.

Living with HIV Infection

You can stay healthy or even improve your health by keeping your immune system strong. A strong immune system helps fight infections. It can give you more energy. It can even repair damaged tissues.

To make your immune system stronger, you may need to make changes in your life.

Making changes can be hard. Knowing the facts about keeping your immune system strong gives you more choices.

Eating Well

A good diet gives you the nutrition you need and maintains body weight. It can also prevent or improve digestive problems.

There are many diets to choose from. You can find one to suit your tastes. It is important to ask your health care provider or a nutritionist about any diet changes.

Eat foods from each of these groups every day: Fruits

Vegetables

Protein (beans, nuts, seeds, soy products, cooked meats or eggs)

Grains (bread, cereal, rice, pasta, whole grains)

Dairy (milk, cheeses, soy milk)

Include some fats to help maintain your weight. Remember to drink plenty of water.

Some people like 3 meals a day. Others prefer 6 smaller meals.

Decide what you like and stick to your plan. Eat a variety of foods to keep your meals interesting.

Vitamins and mineral supplements taken along with a healthy diet can help people with HIV.

If you have questions or have problems eating or digesting your food, talk with your health care provider or nutritionist

Staying Fit

Moderate physical exercise can help you stay healthy. Choose a variety of physical activities you like to do.

Find exercise you can do alone and exercise you can do with others. Then exercise can be a time to be alone or a time to be social, depending on your mood.

Just being outside in the fresh air can give you energy and help you get started. Use sunscreen when you exercise outdoors.

An overall fitness program combines activities for strength, flexibility and endurance. Talk with your doctor before beginning a new exercise plan.

Staying Rested and Calm

Get plenty of rest. If you can't sleep, talk with your health care provider or a counsellor.

Rest also means taking quiet time for yourself. Let your body slow down and relax. If you don't already have some way to relax, find out about meditation or breathing exercises. Just paying attention to your breathing can help calm your mind and body.

Avoiding Infections

Avoid exposing your body to infections. Infections weaken your immune system. If your immune system is already weak, infections can do more damage to your health.

You can reduce your risk of infection. Here are some things to do:

Keep your living area clean and free of dust.

Before and after fixing meals, clean your hands, kitchen area and cutting boards. Use a separate cutting board for meat.

Wash and scrub all fruits and vegetables.

Don't eat raw or under-cooked dairy products, eggs or meats.

Wear gloves when you garden. This will protect you from bacteria in the soil.

Wear gloves when you clean pet cages or faeces. Or ask a friend to help if you have pets.

Avoid being around people who have a cold, flu or any other infection that's easy to catch. Wash your hands often.

Avoid unsafe sex. Unsafe sex could expose you to other sexually transmitted diseases or infections.

If You Use Drugs

Tobacco, caffeine, alcohol and other drugs can weaken the immune system. It is best not to use them.

If you can't stop, what can you reasonably expect yourself to do? Even cutting back can help. A counsellor, drug treatment program, or addiction recovery support group may help you cut back or stop. Prescription and other drugs can also affect your health. Ask your doctor about them.

Pregnancy and HIV

A mother can pass HIV to the fetus in the womb. She can also pass HIV to the baby at birth or through breast-feeding.

A pregnant woman can take medicines to help herself and greatly reduce the baby's risk.

Many women with HIV are living healthy and have had healthy children. Some women have healthy children but are sick themselves. And some women have had children who are sick or have died.

Think about how you will be able to provide for a child. Will other caregivers be available to help? It is also important to find out how pregnancy may affect your overall health.

Whatever you decide, work with your doctor early to make a healthy plan of action.