

Disclosing your HIV status: How to do it

When disclosing your HIV status, every situation is unique. Revealing it to different people such as your family, friends, or sexual partners, can give rise to different emotions and challenges.

To your family, friends and people close to you

Withholding such significant information can mean an emotional burden. It can often be difficult to keep medication, medical appointments, or periods of illness a secret. The level of trust and rapport you have with your family and friends will be crucial in deciding whether to tell them. It is helpful to consider those people close to you who have been supportive, accepting, loving and respectful of your privacy, and who are sensitive and trustworthy.

Within your cultural and family context, there may be barriers to talking openly about HIV, because of lack of knowledge, unfounded fears, or existing prejudices. **It is therefore important to assess whether disclosing your HIV status could lead to painful or awkward situations.**

When telling your children, you may wonder whether they will be able to keep the secret in the circles they move in. Explanations may be adapted to their age, starting with basic and clear concepts, and then adding more details as they get older. **Information should be adapted to suit their level of understanding and development.**

It is important to convey the fact that living with people who have HIV poses no risk of transmission to others. Moreover, most people with whom we come into contact may feel more reassured if told we are receiving proper medical care, taking care of ourselves and are aware of available sources of support.



To your partners

Disclosing your HIV status to a partner can be stressful if you or the other person are concerned about HIV transmission. Unfortunately, many people with HIV have experienced rejection because of this. Before sharing information that matters so much to you, think about why you wish to do so and what kind of relationship you want to have with that person.

It is critical to bear in mind that your sexual partners may have unrealistic expectations about sex and HIV and may not trust or may have misconceptions about the effectiveness of condoms, lubricants, or the message "Undetectable = Untransmissible" (i.e., that when a person has been treated and has no viral load, HIV is not transmitted during sex), despite the scientific evidence supporting this information.

Many people do not see the need to disclose their HIV status if the risk of HIV transmission during sex is low. Others, however, feel that sharing this information makes it easier to make informed decisions about sex.

It is normal to feel insecure when meeting someone for the first time and to feel concern about their reaction and whether they will respect your privacy. **It is therefore important to choose the right time to discuss HIV with sexual partners.** While it may be difficult to broach the subject at the start of a relationship, leaving it for later can create problems in the future. Some people choose to mention HIV casually at the start to gauge the other person's response. If the reaction is negative, they may opt not to continue and save time.

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If you have recently been diagnosed with HIV and are already in a relationship, the question will arise as to whether you should tell your partner. The news can create new concerns and tensions in the relationship. Your partner may be understandably concerned about his or her own health and may wish to be tested for HIV or to reappraise the type of sexual relationship you have. At times, some people may find that disclosing their status leads to even further complications, such as worrying about losing their home, relationship problems, or experiencing physical or verbal violence.

Deciding whether you wish to disclose your HIV status to past sexual partners depends on several factors, such as the nature of the relationship you had, the type of sexual activity, and whether you think they would want to know or whether you want them to take any action. Whatever the circumstances, although it may be complicated, it can help a person to make informed decisions about his or her sexual health.

On social media

Many people with HIV have seen an opportunity to share their status on social media with a larger number of people. Although it may involve unique challenges and risks, many people describe the process of disclosing their HIV status as empowering and as a form of activism to fight stigma.

By opting for this channel of communication, you can choose both the narrative of how you disclose it and the audience. Bear in mind, however, that once the information has been shared, you are unlikely to have any control over what will happen to it. As mentioned above, responses can be very diverse. You will, however, be likely to encounter stigmatising comments, gossip, or other negative reactions.



gt grupo de trabajo sobre tratamientos del VIH
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Si te surge alguna pregunta tras leer esta ficha, te aconsejamos hablar con tu médico o enfermera o llamar a gTt-VIH, al 93 458 26 41, para comprobar si existe alguna novedad relevante al respecto.

www.gtt-vih.org

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