

HIV and quality of life

This booklet is designed to help give you a bit more information about living with HIV and how you can best support your health.

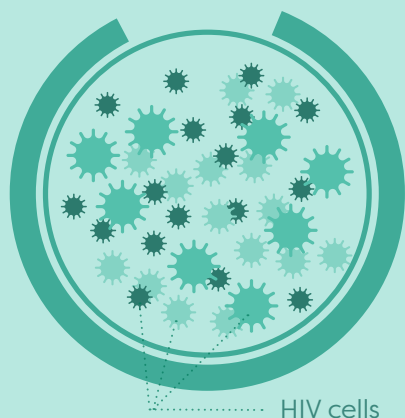


What is viral load?

You may have heard some terms throughout your HIV journey, but still be unsure of what they mean. The next couple of pages aims to give you better understanding of what is happening in your body. Like all viruses, HIV has a viral load. This refers to the amount of virus in your blood.

High viral load

greater than
100,000 copies/mL



HIV cells

A high viral load means there is a lot of the virus in your blood.

Effects:

- This can cause damage to your body.
- There is an increased risk of illness.
- It is easier to pass HIV onto other people.

Low viral load

fewer than
10,000 to 30,000 copies/mL



A low viral load is a reduced amount of HIV in the blood.

Effects:

- There is less damage to your body.

Undetectable


less than
200 copies/mL



An undetectable viral load means the virus is so low in your body it can be hard to find on a standard blood test. Anything less than 200 copies of HIV per 1mL of blood is considered “undetectable”. Taking HIV treatment is required to obtain an undetectable viral load.

Effects:

- This will keep you healthy and means you cannot pass it onto your sexual partners.



Taking HIV medication as prescribed will allow you to maintain an undetectable viral load. It is important to remember that your viral load may fluctuate due to factors such as medications, hormonal changes, stress and testing issues (most common). Fluctuations are normal and are not necessarily cause for alarm - your doctor will work with you if there is anything worth investigating.

Your immune system

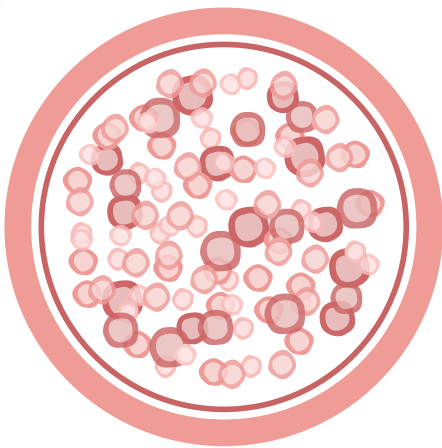
Your immune system fights infections in your body. One of the types of cells in your immune system are CD4 cells. HIV attacks CD4 cells.

A reduced CD4 count will increase your risk of infection and disease.

Healthy

500+ cells

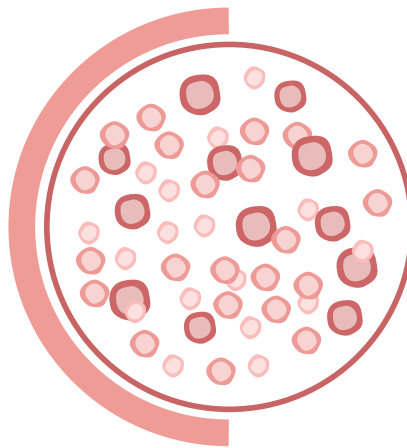
per cubic millimetre of blood



Moderate

200-500 cells

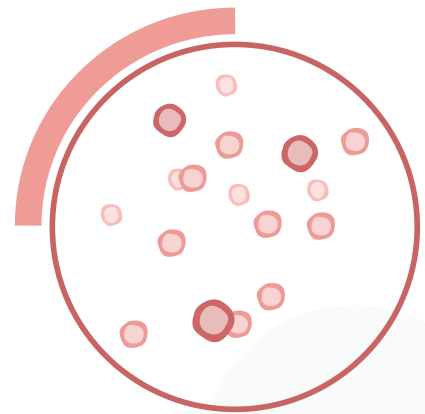
per cubic millimetre of blood



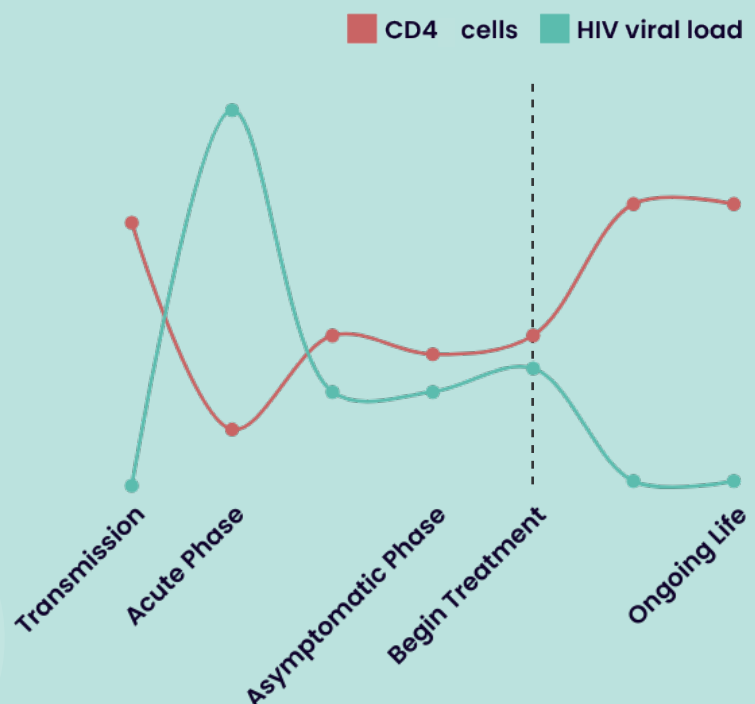
Low

Less than 200 cells

per cubic millimetre of blood



This graph shows the relationship between the viral load and CD4 count, as well as how the introduction of HIV treatment positively supports your immune system and reduces the viral load.



Exploring treatment options

There are different treatment options available for people living with HIV. It is important to work with your health practitioner to determine the best treatment for you.

Treatment currently comes in two forms:

Tablets
(one daily)



Medication (with a script) is available from:

Specific hospitals and pharmacies



Injection
(every 2 months)



Considerations



HIV treatment is very effective but is lifelong.



You may experience side effects from the medication. Talk to your doctor if you do, they may change prescription or give you something to manage the side effects.



Missing or skipping dosages can impact your viral load.



Take your time with your doctor to discuss your treatment. Ask as many questions as you need so you can feel comfortable.



Taking care of your health

As with any chronic condition, there are things you can do to support your health and wellbeing.

Physical Health



Eating well

HIV can impact nutrient intake and uptake in the body. A healthy diet supports overall health and assists in maintaining the immune system. Check out <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/recipes> for more information and meal planning suggestions.



Physical activity

HIV can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, muscle wasting and fatigue. Moderate physical activity is proven to improve heart health, muscle mass, increase energy, and overall physical and mental health. Including exercise in your weekly routine is recommended.



Alcohol, smoking and drugs

As HIV is an inflammatory condition, your body is constantly under stress. Adding other things that can inflame your system will contribute to the pressure on your body. Moderating or reducing use may be challenging, for more support check out the Alcohol and Drug Support Line.



Complementary therapies

Accessing other supports such as physical therapy, massage, acupuncture, and naturopathy can be beneficial for people living with HIV to manage side effects. Talk to your GP before commencing. WAAC can support in suggesting HIV friendly practitioners.



Other health conditions

If you are living with other health conditions, it is crucial to stay on top of everything. It is important to find a trusted GP who you can discuss your HIV status alongside your other health needs.

Mental health and social wellbeing



Keeping your routine

This diagnosis can be overwhelming, but it does not have to stop you from living your regular life adding some additional structure while you are still adjusting can help maintain routine.



Physical activity

Any form of physical activity is beneficial for mental health - walking, swimming, gardening, cycling, playing sport. Even better if it is outdoors!



Being connected

It can be easy to withdraw or disconnect from people and hobbies after receiving your diagnosis which will have an enormous impact on your mental health. Social connection is one of the best ways to support your mental health.



Talk to someone

Not everyone in your life needs to know your status, but you might find it helpful to have some people you can trust and confide in - this may be a friend, family member or a professional.



Get involved with WAAC

WAAC specialises in HIV support. WAAC helps people with HIV take control of their health, as well as the health of their partners, by providing information, programs and services including counselling, case management and peer support.

Contact
WAAC

 (08) 9482 0000

 hello@waac.com.au



About your legal rights



Navigating your legal rights when it comes to HIV can be overwhelming; make sure you take some time to understand where you stand.

For a comprehensive overview of legal rights around HIV disclosure we suggest you read the **HIV/AIDS Legal Centre guide**.

You can find it here: <https://halc.org.au/publications/guides-to-hiv-and-the-law/>

Discrimination

- People living with HIV are protected by law from acts of discrimination. For a list of unlawful discriminatory acts visit HALC's guide.
- If you believe you have been discriminated against you can make a report to Fair Work, Equal Opportunity Commission or the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Medical and dental procedures

- In WA, you do not have to disclose your HIV status before undergoing any form of medical/dental treatment or examination.
- However, it can be helpful for medical professionals to be aware so they can factor it into your care and be aware of potential interactions with your HIV medication and any medication they may prescribe.

Sexual partners

- You can still have sex!
- In WA, you are not required to disclose your HIV status before having sex. However, you and your partner/s must take reasonable precautions to reduce transmission risk, including:
 - using condoms,
 - having an undetectable viral load, or
 - your partner using PrEP.
- If you negligently or intentionally transmit HIV to a sexual partner you may face criminal charges.

Employment

- You can still work!
- You are not required to tell an employer or prospective employer of your HIV status for most jobs. The Australian Defence Force and some medical professional and aviation roles will have restrictions and guidelines. It is important to know your rights around employment soon after diagnosis.

Australian visa and residency

- We suggest seeking support about what your HIV diagnosis might mean for your visa or residency status in Australia. Estrin Saul Lawyers and Migration Specialists offer free consultations for WAAC clients.
- You may also find it useful to look at the Positive Migration Guide at halc.org.au

Having children

- There are a number of strategies to significantly reduce the risk of HIV transmission from parent to child.
- We suggest talking to your doctor if you are considering having a child, to talk through your options. If you are already pregnant, we suggest seeing your doctor as soon as possible. Informing your doctor of your HIV status is crucial to ensure they can make informed decisions on the health of you and your child.

Psycho-social supports

WAAC

(08) 9482 000
waac.com.au

HIV Support LGBTIQA+ Support

RUAH

13 78 24
ruah.org.au

Family Services Homelessness

Family & Domestic Violence

Legal Services Mental Health

Peer Based Harm Reduction WA

(08) 9325 8387
harmreductionwa.org

Peer-based Support Education

Drug Use Advocacy

Harm Minimisation

LUMA

(08) 6330 5400
luma.org.au

Children & Family Alcohol & Other Drugs

Aboriginal Women Eating Disorders

Family & Domestic Violence

Mental Health Women's Health

Derbal Yerrigan

1300 420 272
dyhs.org.au

Aboriginal Health & Wellbeing

Mental Health Dental Services

Palmerston

palmerston.org.au

Alcohol & Other Drugs Group support

Counselling Residential Rehabilitation

