

Living Positive



For You

You've just learned that you have HIV? Or you have a close friend, a partner or family member who is living with HIV? This brochure provides information on living with HIV and points you towards more resources, support and opportunities to meet others. It is written by and for people with HIV and is brought to you by the Hiv Vereniging (Dutch Association of people living with HIV), the grass roots organization defending the interests of all people living with HIV in the Netherlands. The text of this brochure follows a structure similar to our website, hivvereniging.nl. There, you can find (in Dutch) even more information, tips and advice.

Contents

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| • 1 Living with HIV | 1 |
| • 2 HIV Care | 4 |
| • 3 Healthy Living | 8 |
| • 4 Sex and Dating | 11 |
| • 5 Work and Finances | 14 |
| • 6 Travel | 17 |
| • 7 Community | 20 |

1. Living with HIV

If you've just learned you have HIV, there are probably many thoughts going through your mind. Should I tell others? Who? Could I have prevented it? How will the people close to me react? How can I come to terms with my faith? There's one thing you must know: you can live a long, happy life with HIV. It won't do you any good now to stay stuck in the past. All that matters is how you live from now on, now that you know you have HIV. It takes some people longer than others to deal with this. Each individual reacts differently to being diagnosed with HIV, because everyone has his or her own story. Often, your particular story determines how long it will take you to accept that you will be living with HIV from now on.

To disclose or not to disclose?

It's completely up to you to decide who you will tell that you have HIV. It's perfectly fine if you prefer to wait a while before telling anyone. However, experience will teach you that it often does you good to talk about your HIV status with others. It's not easy to live with a secret, and there are probably people in your surroundings whom you trust and with whom you can talk about HIV. Afterwards, you will feel like a weight has been lifted off your shoulders. You may be worried about how people will react. In most cases, it's a lot easier than you think. Most of the people you know will have no problem looking past your HIV status. They will love you just as much now as they did before your diagnosis. Yet, some people may react negatively. They may try to make you feel guilty, or accuse you of being careless or stupid. This usually has to do with their

own inability to deal with this kind of information. In other words: their negative reaction says more about them than it does about you.

Undetectable = Untransmittable

HIV is a virus that is most often spread through sexual intercourse. HIV medication ensures that the virus is suppressed, so it is no longer visible in your blood. Then, you have what is called an 'undetectable viral load'. In other words, the amount of the virus particles in your blood is so low that it is not even measurable. That also means you cannot pass HIV on to others. 'Undetectable' is the same as being 'Untransmittable'. We call this U=U, or in Dutch 'n=n' (niet meetbaar = niet overdraagbaar). Various international studies have proven that this is true for sexual intercourse between people irrespective of sexual orientations. This is extremely important news for people with HIV because they no longer have to be afraid of passing the virus on to others. It's also an important fact for people who don't have HIV. That's because this information can help get rid of long-standing prejudices about people with HIV. It can also help make sure that people living with HIV are treated just like everyone else. Unfortunately, there are still many people who haven't heard the news yet. Even healthcare providers like your dentist or doctor may not yet be up to date on this. That's why the Hiv Vereniging is leading a national campaign about n=n.

To find out more, visit hivvereniging.nl/n-is-n.

The 'Living Positive' Workshop

The Hiv Vereniging offers a short series of workshops for people who have just learned they have HIV or are at the point where they want to get more out of living with HIV. Just like this brochure, the workshop is called 'Living Positive'. It is organised regularly throughout the Netherlands and hosted by people who are living with HIV themselves. Visit the website for more information and upcoming dates: hivvereniging.nl/ontmoeten/workshopreeks.

Servicepunt

The Hiv Vereniging also offers an information hotline which you can call for personal consultation. You can also send questions by e-mail. Many of the volunteers who work at the Servicepunt are living with HIV themselves. They are always there to listen and answer questions or help you find the information and support you need. The Servicepunt can be reached on 020 689 25 77 or by email: servicepunt@hivvereniging.nl.

For more information, go to hivvereniging.nl/hiv-wat-nu. There, you will find lots of information, including a video with Tim, who gives advice to people who have just learned they have HIV.

Hanne (26)
HIV-positive since 2015

'HIV has given me more self-worth'

'My life didn't fall apart when I found out I have HIV. But I was afraid that people would label me from now on or see me as "Hanne, the girl with HIV". Immediately after my diagnosis, I told one of my friends. She said, "Don't worry! I'll be there for you." I can't think of a more perfect response. After that, I told my parents as well. My mother felt really sorry for me and we both had to cry about it. As far as my dad was concerned: I'm his little girl and he doesn't want anything bad to happen

to me. He was nothing but loving and supportive. I'm not good at lying: either I say nothing, or I tell the truth. By the end of the first two weeks, I'd already told a lot of people. Shortly after that, I started my treatment. I'll never forget the evening I took my first pill. I thought, "This is the beginning of the rest of my life." I'm proud of myself for how I'm dealing with it and what I'm making of it. HIV gave me more sense of self-worth and a better understanding of who I want to be.'



2. HIV Care

In the Netherlands, HIV treatment exclusively takes place at 26 designated hospitals throughout the country. Everyone who is diagnosed with HIV will be referred to one of these hospitals. By the time you're reading this, you've probably already been through your first appointment. Often, the first time can be overwhelming: you're still coming to terms with finding out you have HIV and then 'all of a sudden' you're sitting in an examination room with a specialist. If possible, it's good to bring someone along with you, such as a close friend or family member. Two people hear more than one, and that can be very helpful in the beginning. It can also help to write down or record important information so you can read over it or listen to it again later. After the nervousness and emotions of the first appointment, you'll soon see that it becomes a routine. In the hospital, there are specialised HIV departments with teams consisting of an HIV nurse and a doctor who is a specialist in infectious diseases. Your HIV nurse is your first point of contact if you have questions or need to discuss something. The specialist in infectious diseases will help you decide on your treatment and keep track of how it's going. Of course, he or she will also answer any questions or discuss any issues you may have.

Your Doctor's Appointment

Before each doctor's appointment, you will first give blood samples for testing. This usually takes place a few weeks before your actual appointment, so you can go over the results together with your specialist. Your blood will be tested for all kinds of things. How are your liver and kidneys doing? How high or low is your viral load? How well is your immune system functioning?

Your specialist is there to talk with you about the medical side of living with HIV. It's helpful to write a list of all your questions before you go see your specialist.

This way, you will be prepared for your appointment and make sure you get the answers to all your questions. At hivvereniging.nl/hiv-zorg/hiv-behandeling, you can find a checklist of possible questions and topics that may come up during your doctor's appointments. You can also read more about what the various blood tests mean.

When speaking with your HIV nurse, you can talk not just about medical questions but also any other personal matters on your mind. For example, you may talk about other healthcare providers you deal with, or discuss questions about sexuality, work or any other topic. The HIV team has a broad network of other healthcare providers, both inside and outside the hospital.

It's important to build a good relationship with your HIV nurse, because that makes it easier for you to talk about your questions. Many people have a closer bond with their nurse than with their doctor, because the

nurse usually has more time and attention to give them. Others are satisfied just to go to the doctor's appointment and rarely see their nurse. It's up to you to decide what works best for you and your own personal healthcare needs.

Especially during the first few visits, most people tend not to look too critically at their HIV team. You might think, 'The specialist and nurse will always know what's best, won't they?!' Don't be afraid to ask critical questions though. After all, this is your treatment, not theirs.

Get all the information you need, even if you have to push to get answers.

HIV Treatment

Nowadays, everyone who receives an HIV diagnosis starts taking HIV medication within a few weeks. It has been proven that this is better for your health, also in the long run. Additionally, HIV medication keeps the virus undetectable in your blood, which makes it impossible to pass it on to others. This is something to keep in mind if you're struggling with the idea of taking medication every day.

You may find it annoying to constantly be reminded that you have HIV, or to fit your medication into your daily life or work routine. Most people with HIV find that it gets easier and easier to take their medication every day. You can always discuss with your HIV team to determine the best setup for you. For example, there are various apps that help remind you to take your pills on time.

It's important to take your medication every day. It's not the end of the world if you forget one time. But, if you take

your medication irregularly for a long period, it can have a negative effect on the effectiveness of your treatment. It might even cause the virus to become resistant to certain HIV medications. That means they will be less effective for you. For your treatment to succeed, you must take your medication as prescribed.

Effective HIV treatment has been around since 1996. The HIV medications available today are much better than those early medicines. They also have far fewer side effects. These days, there are many options for HIV medication, and often you only have to take one pill a day. If you have just started taking HIV medication, pay close attention to any alterations you experience. Are your sleeping habits the same as they were before? Do you feel tired more often? Or do you suddenly feel depressed or moody? Talk with your HIV team about any possible side effects. If you experience too many limitations, ask them about alternatives.

Research

People with HIV are one of the most studied groups of people. You will probably also be approached regularly about taking part in a study. This depends, among other things, on the

type of hospital where you receive your treatment. At university hospitals, people are asked more often to take part in studies. One advantage of all these studies is that you can receive treatment more quickly in case the researchers find anything unusual. You are also contributing to the development of new medicines. The disadvantage of participating is that it usually takes up more of your time because you will have to go to the hospital more often for check-ups. Just be aware that you are not obliged to participate in a study if you don't want to and you can always say no. In any case, always ask for clear information about what the study is about, what the results will be used for and how much of your time it will take up. If you do not object, all your information will be anonymized and

added to a national database, as from your first doctor's appointment. All kinds of statistics are collected in this way; for example, information about how many people have HIV in the Netherlands and how many in this group have an undetectable viral load. This research by the HIV Monitoring Foundation (Stichting Hiv Monitoring) is very important for keeping track of the health of people with HIV in the Netherlands.

Find out more about HIV care at hivvereniging.nl/hiv-zorg. Here, you can find all kinds of information, including about how to deal more critically with healthcare professionals in your HIV team.

Melitia (46) HIV-positive since 2002

'In 2002, I became seriously ill. My doctor thought I was suffering from a burn-out. When it got so bad that I could hardly even breathe, his colleagues finally insisted that he refer me to the hospital. There, they discovered I had a lung infection and an infection in my throat. Only after I had an allergic reaction and wound up in intensive care, one of the doctors had me tested for HIV. That's when I learned I was HIV-positive. My first reaction was, "Finally! I knew something was really wrong. I wasn't just being crazy!" After that, the

'I talk about everything with my specialist.'

nursing staff wanted nothing to do with me. I went five days without them cleaning my bed. Finally, I asked to be transferred to the AMC in Amsterdam. That is a hospital where I could go through my illness and get better. I talk about everything with my specialist. She is good because she treats me with respect and doesn't judge me. She is an expert and, if she doesn't know the answer, she looks it up and always gets back to me about it. The AMC might seem like a factory sometimes, but, with my specialist, I always feel like I'm being treated as a human being.'



3. Healthy Living

Healthy living is important for everyone, whether you have HIV or not. Watching what you eat, not drinking too much alcohol, getting regular exercise and plenty of rest: these are all good ideas, also for people with HIV.

Smoking

Smoking is bad for your health. Various studies have shown that smoking has an even worse impact on your health if you have HIV. If you are a smoker, try to quit. If you cannot do it on your own, talk about it with your HIV team. There are programmes, where you can receive guidance for quitting smoking. Just imagine how much money you

would save by quitting. For some people, this can give a little extra motivation to kick the habit.

Medication

Your HIV medication slows down the reproduction of the virus in your body. A major advantage of this is that it prevents you from passing on the virus to others. Additionally, starting promptly with HIV treatment is good for your health. The sooner you start, the less harm the virus can do to your body. The long-term effects of taking daily HIV medication depend on the type of medicines you take and how long you take them. A person who started taking

Ruben (35)
HIV-positive since 2008

***'I feel confident about
my future.'***

'I always combine my hospital visit with something fun. I treat myself. Life is like a box of crayons and we all get to choose whether we want to get out the yellow one or the black one. I usually go for the cheerful colours.'

HIV added a new dimension to my life. I started seeing a therapist right away to give my life more direction. HIV doesn't hold me back, it is a part of my life. I am much more conscious now of my health than I was before I had HIV. I feel strong and full of life. To me, good health means physical exercise and relaxing the mind.

I find those in cross-fit and yoga. Yoga is my greatest support and refuge. It always hurts at first, but if you allow yourself to get past the pain, you relax your entire body. It's taught me how to quit being a victim and become a warrior. I look forward to the future with confidence. I find comfort in the fact that I have a complete check-up twice a year. Who else has such a luxury? HIV care is so well organised here.'



first-generation HIV medication twenty years ago will probably experience more difficulties with this than someone who just started taking medication a year ago. It's always good to talk with your HIV team about any questions or concerns you may have.

Healthy Body and Mind

It's also important to take good care of your mental health. This is something we often overlook when we think about our health in general. Being diagnosed with HIV can cause a lot of additional stress, especially initially. Worries about who to disclose to, concerns about your children, your job or your future – all of these can strain your mental health. Often, you can take matters into your own hands to restore balance in your life. Rest and relaxation, walking, meditation, yoga or exercise are just a few ways you can tune out the noise in your head. Having a nice conversation with someone who cares about you can also do wonders. Some people benefit from seeing a therapist or psychologist. Depending on the challenges your HIV diagnosis brings you, professional help can support you get a firm grip on how to lead a fulfilling life with HIV.

Ageing with HIV

Fortunately, these days you can live a long, healthy life with HIV. Of course, if you avoid smoking, get regular exercise and do not abuse drugs or alcohol, you will be much healthier in life. Currently, extensive research is being carried out on how HIV affects people as they grow older. The life expectancy of a person with HIV – as long as their treatment is effective – is generally the same as for a person without HIV.

You can start living healthier now, in order to enjoy better health in the future. You can keep track of this together with your HIV nurse or specialist and take action where necessary.

Find out more about research on growing older with HIV here:

hivvereniging.nl/gezond-leven/oud-worden-met-hiv.

If you want to find out more about living a healthy life with HIV, check out this page:

hivvereniging.nl/gezond-leven.

4. Sex and Dating

HIV is most often contracted through sexual intercourse. For many people, HIV and sex are sensitive subjects which they don't easily talk about with others. Negative thoughts and feelings can prevent people from enjoying sex. Now that you are living with HIV, you may ask yourself whether and how it will impact your sex life. As you know, HIV medication ensures that you cannot pass it on to others. Perhaps you feel that this is an important reason to start treatment. Once your viral load is undetectable, you no longer have to worry. Of course, even though you know this, you may still struggle with negative thoughts. We have been taught for years to always use a condom to protect ourselves from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STD's). Condoms are still a good choice for protecting yourself against other STD's and pregnancy. However, there is no reason for you to fear that you will infect someone else with HIV as long as your viral load is being suppressed by your medication, even if you decide not to use a condom.

Not in the Mood

Perhaps you have no interest in sex at all right now. This is a very common reaction among people who have just learned they are living with HIV. Take your time to get used to your new situation and to be able to enjoy sex again. Even people who have had HIV for years still deal with this from time to time. It may also be related to your medication and a reduced libido. If this causes you a lot of concern, do discuss it with your HIV team, depending on how open you feel you can be with them. Together, you can talk about what's going on and see what can be done about it. To be able to enjoy sex and

intimacy, your mind needs to be in the right place. If you're too concerned with other things, this won't work. Just be aware that negative thoughts usually disappear, the longer you live with HIV. Talking about these feelings can help you deal with them better. You may want to talk to your partner or a close friend. It can also help to talk to someone else who has HIV and can identify with what you're going through.

Dating and Relationships

HIV doesn't have to get in the way of having a relationship. If you've just found out you have HIV, it can be difficult at first. If your partner also has HIV, you may feel like things are easier or more equal between you. If your partner doesn't have HIV, you both need time to adjust to the new situation. What matters most is how well you communicate with each other about what's on your mind. Be honest about your feelings so that your partner is aware of how you feel. Your partner should also do the same with you. If you're single and looking for someone to start a relationship with, the fact that you have HIV may make you feel insecure at first. In the gay community, people are more familiar with HIV. This can make dating easier for them. However, there are plenty of examples of gay men with HIV who face prejudices when they try to start dating. Heterosexuals, on the other hand, often see HIV as something that will never affect them personally. Often, they've never known anyone who is living with HIV. As a result, they often have outdated knowledge about what it means to live with HIV. If you were born with HIV and decide to tell your new romantic partner, they may not even believe you

at first. Yet, aside from all the negative experiences with dating, there are also many positive ones. There are always people who can look past your HIV status, who are aware that you can live a happy life with HIV and who know that the virus cannot be passed on as long as you are on treatment. And that you can have children who are born free from HIV.

When Do You Tell Your Partner?

There comes a time when you will want to disclose your HIV status to the person you're dating. For people who are living with HIV – even after many years – this is often a big moment. When do I tell them? How will they react? How will I deal with it if they react negatively? What if they reject me? The way you approach this often depends on how well you yourself have accepted the

fact that you are living with HIV. How much you love yourself, even with HIV. If you've accepted yourself with HIV, a negative reaction from someone else will probably have less of an impact on you. After all, people get rejected by others for many reasons: for being overweight, too short, talking too much or not saying enough. This list goes on and on. If the other person doesn't want to join you on your adventure, or simply doesn't have the courage, then just keep looking.

Find out more information about dealing with sex, relationships and dating at hivvereniging.nl/seksualiteit. There, you can read about many topics, including sexual problems and having sex under the influence of drugs and alcohol. You can also find information about pregnancy and having children.

Janice (42)
HIV-positive since 2000

'Men will still be men.'

'My boyfriend passed away in 2000 due to complications from AIDS. I discovered that I also had HIV and I was left on my own with my four-year-old daughter. I was in no mood to have people gossiping, so I decided right away that I would be open about my HIV status. A year later, I met a new man. One time during sex, the condom broke and I became pregnant. My doctor told me that I could have the baby and that it would be born without HIV. The day I decided to keep the baby, my boyfriend headed for the door. Eight years ago,

I met my current partner. On our second date, I told him I am living with HIV. At first, he didn't believe me. So, we made an appointment at the Municipal Health Service (GGD), so he could hear it from them as well. He didn't dump me and sees me as a human being and not just as a person with HIV. I was thrilled when my nurse told me about n=n. But I don't want to take any chances and still use a condom. After all, men will still be men. If he decides to get his kicks elsewhere and catches something, then I'd be stuck with it too.'



5. Work and Finances

Living with HIV doesn't have to hold you back, even if you have a job or want to find one. But it can raise all kinds of questions. Do I have to tell my (future) employer that I am living with HIV? How can I secure a regular income? What about receiving benefits? Can I be compensated for my additional healthcare costs?

At Work

You are not legally required to tell your (future) boss that you are living with HIV. It is against the law for anyone to ask about your HIV status during a job interview. You also cannot lose your job for having HIV. Some people who have HIV decide to tell

their boss or some of their co-workers. This makes them feel freer. Of course, it all depends on how comfortable you feel at work. It may be useful to tell others in case you ever need time off for a doctor's appointment, or if you ever need to take sick leave because you aren't feeling at your best. This way, you don't have to make up excuses.

Good employers take the health and wellness of their employees seriously. Unfortunately, not all employers are the same. If your job becomes too stressful, especially now that you're dealing with the fact you have HIV, see if it's possible to (temporarily) switch to working fewer hours, or look for a new job.

Bryan (23)
HIV-positive since 2015

***'HIV has never
held me back.'***

'During the first six months after my diagnosis, I hardly told anyone. I was scared how people might react. After a while, I found out about the 'Young and Positive' group at the Hiv Vereniging. I didn't really feel like going at first, but it actually felt really good to hear about other people's experiences. Ever since, I've been more open about it. Things were tough that first half-year. But since I've started feeling more secure about myself, it's only gotten better. Five years ago, I started my own film company. First, I worked as an executive producer and now I film theatrical shows and weddings.

When the building I was working in got torn down, I found a new place. Now, I run a car dealership there together with my boyfriend. He does the selling and I take care of procurement. HIV has never held me back in my work, except in the very beginning. I get my energy out of working and I've never been sick. Aside from my paid work, I also volunteer now for the Hiv Vereniging. I do that mainly because of my experiences in dealing with shame. I hope nobody else ever has to go through what I went through.'



On the first Monday of each month, the Hiv Vereniging offers advice on questions related to HIV and work. Call 020 620 2122 to make an appointment. You can request either an in-person meeting or ask to be called back for a consultation over the phone.

Financial Matters

Living with HIV can result in extra (healthcare) costs. This can make your monthly expenses go up. With your check-ups at the hospital and your medications, your health insurance deductible will be used up before you know it. There are institutions and organisations that can support you if you have additional costs or need to supplement your income. For example, you can get in touch with your town council, which may offer programmes and benefits. This varies depending on your situation and where you live. Visit the website of your town council for more information.

Home Loans and Life Insurance

Today, home loans are available to people who are living with HIV. You can often even take out a life insurance policy for the regular premium. The Hiv Vereniging has worked together with a group of financial experts to create a website about HIV and finances: positief-over-geldzaken.nl. There, you will find lots of useful information and advice.

Health Insurance

At the end of each year, your health insurance provider in the Netherlands will send you a new policy proposal. Now that you have HIV, it is more important than ever to read your policy conditions carefully. If you have a full-reimbursement policy (a 'restitutiepolis' in Dutch), you are free to choose which healthcare providers you go to. If you have a preferred-provider policy (a 'naturapolis' in Dutch), it is important to check to make sure your HIV treatment centre, dentist, doctor and other healthcare providers will all be covered under the same conditions. If that's not the case, you may consider switching to a full-reimbursement policy, although this will be more expensive. Are you dealing with heavy healthcare costs on a low income? If so, you can often negotiate with your insurance company to adapt your monthly installments.

Find more tips and practical information at the Hiv Vereniging's website: hivvereniging.nl/werk-geld.

6. Travel

Travelling abroad can be stressful. Especially if you have HIV. How much medication should I take with me? What if I lose my luggage which contains my medication? What if customs officials search my bags and see my pills? How strictly do I have to keep up with my Dutch medication schedule if I travel to a different time zone? Don't worry! The more you travel, the less stressful it will become.

Packing Your Bags

It's best to pack your medication inside your carry-on luggage. Then, there's less chance of losing it, and you'll have it with you in case your other luggage is delayed. Be sure to bring enough medicine to last for a few extra days in case you have to stay away from home for longer than expected. Your HIV team can provide you with a medical declaration in English. This states that you take certain medication and that the medicines in your luggage are for your personal use only. It does not refer specifically to 'HIV' medication or indicate that you are HIV-positive. You can show this declaration

to customs officials in case of any questions about your pills. However, this is hardly ever necessary. It is also useful to ask your pharmacy for a list of your medications and to carry an extra prescription from your specialist, just in case. Check your travel insurance carefully to find the emergency number to call in case you need healthcare while travelling.

Medication Schedule in a Different Time Zone?

This question is only important if you travel to a destination with a major time difference. If there is only a time difference of one or two hours, then you can simply keep taking your medication at the same time as you would at home in the Netherlands. So, if you take your pills at 9 in the morning, for example, you can do that during your trip as well. If the time difference is greater, you can adjust your medication schedule in a few big steps, so you are back on your normal schedule, but then at the local time in your destination. It's a good idea to talk with your HIV nurse about this in advance. They probably have some good advice for you.

Lost Your Pills?

You never expect it, of course, but it can happen that you lose your HIV medication during your trip. It's important to get new medication as quickly as possible. Interrupting your HIV treatment can increase your risk of the virus becoming resistant to the medication. If your virus becomes resistant, it means your current medicines stop working or work less effectively for you.

Often, it's faster to get new medication locally than to wait for it to be shipped from the Netherlands. You can call the emergency number of your health insurance to find out where you can get new medication locally. Often, you can be reimbursed for the costs after you return home.

Bart (40)
HIV-positive since 2013

Not Always Welcome

You should be aware that there are some countries where people with HIV are officially not allowed to enter. Also, attitudes and legislation about sex with people who have HIV may vary from one country to the next. It is often a good idea to avoid these destinations. Visit hivtravel.org for an overview of the countries that set travel limits for people with HIV.

If you have any questions, visit hivvereniging.nl/reizen. There, you will find lots of information, including tips on managing your medication schedule when you travel to a different time zone.

'I got the information I needed'

'I love to travel, but when I found out I had HIV, it became really stressful at first. I got the information I needed from the people at the Hiv Vereniging, but all that flew away the minute I walked from check-in to security. I could hear my pills rattling in my backpack and I just knew I was going to be held back. Of course, I wasn't. During another trip, I was at the gate and discovered that I forgot to bring my medication with me. I was going to be gone for a week and I was scared to death. It took a lot of effort, but finally I was able to get my medication locally

at the place where I was travelling. Now I know that there's a little flexibility if you skip your pills one time, and I'm less nervous about it. But back then I thought my pills would stop working if I forgot them even once. Now, whenever I put my pills in the tray to go through security at the airport, I know that nobody around me even notices them. The only one who makes a big deal out of their medication is the one who takes it. As soon as you learn that, travelling becomes way less stressful for you.'



7. Community

This brochure is filled with tips about how you can live a long, happy and healthy life with HIV. But the most important advice we can give you is: meet other people who are living with HIV! Share your experiences and hear how they are dealing with it. It helps to compare your own story with other people's situations, so you can put things into perspective. Others who have had HIV for a long time have probably had to deal with many of the same questions you are dealing with now. Every person and every situation is different, of course. In the end, you have to find what works for you. Still, getting help from others who are in a similar situation can make all the difference. Meeting other people living with HIV will make you feel stronger.

Meet-ups

The Hiv Vereniging regularly organises activities all over the Netherlands. Many of these meet-ups are 'mixed', which means they are for people living with HIV, as well as their HIV-negative loved ones. There are also special activities just for women, heterosexual men, young people, families, immigrants and gay and bisexual men. On the website of the Hiv Vereniging, you can find a calendar that shows all the activities (hivvereniging.nl/ontmoeten/agenda). Here, you can also find activities organised by other groups, organisations and institutions.

Of course, you can also become a volunteer for one of the various groups within the Hiv Vereniging, such as Posividas (for women with HIV), Positive Families (for families with one or more HIV-positive member), Long-Term Survivors (for people who became HIV-positive before 2000) or Poz&Proud (for gay men with HIV). There are also several diverse groups all over the Netherlands where you can volunteer. Becoming active with others who live with HIV, like you, not only enables you to make new friends, it also helps you on your path towards self-acceptance.

Stronger Together

The Hiv Vereniging represents the interests of all people with HIV in the Netherlands. It provides information about living with HIV and organises all kinds of meet-ups. The more people who become a member of the Hiv Vereniging, the stronger we become as we stand up for everyone who lives with HIV.

You can help us in our mission by becoming a member. Plus, you will receive discounts on all kinds of activities, and you can make your voice heard at our members' assemblies. As a member, you also receive our magazine plus> three times a year. Register today at: hivvereniging.nl/lid-worden.

Acknowledgements

Publisher's note

This brochure is a translated version of the Dutch brochure 'Positief Leven' and is published by the Hiv Vereniging. Please note that when we refer to our website, the information there is in Dutch.

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Special Thanks to:

Hanne, Melitia, Ruben, Janice, Bryan and Bart

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This and other publications and activities of the Hiv Vereniging are made possible by contributions from our members and donors, through subsidies (Netherlands National Institute for Public Health and the Environment and Stichting Fonds PGO) and project contributions (Aidsfonds, Stichting 4US and Stichting Vrienden van the Hiv Vereniging), as well as through sponsorships by Gilead Sciences, Janssen-Cilag and ViiV Healthcare.



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