

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy safer sexual pleasure!

Living With HIV and Enjoying Safe, Sexy Sex

Many seniors who are living with HIV are concerned about how sexy they are to other people and how to protect themselves and their partner(s) while enjoying intimacy and sex. Here are some tips:

- 1. Talk about your status.** For most HIV positive folks, disclosing their status is one of their biggest challenges. If you have concerns about infecting others or being reinfected, or if you're worried about disclosure, you may have squashed your desires and best intentions before even getting started. As an HIV-positive senior, you can enjoy satisfying relationships (with sex or not) if you communicate openly and honestly with your partner(s). When planning to disclose your status, it may be helpful to think about the best time, the best place, and what will you say.
- 2. Green Light, Yellow Light, Red Light.** Think about safer sex activities in terms of "Green Light" (no risk) such as masturbation, sexual fantasies, massage, holding hands, showering together, using sex toys (not sharing them) hugging, and/or kissing. "Yellow Light" (low risk) behaviors like oral sex, vaginal and/or anal sex with a condom (use with lube). "Red Light" (high risk) behaviors like vaginal and/or anal sex without a condom, and intercourse ending in withdrawal (pulling out). Try to reduce your risk by using condoms as consistently (and correctly) as possible.
- 3. Lower your viral load.** HIV treatment works by reducing the level of HIV in the body (the viral load) to such an extent that a person's infectiousness is almost zero (sometimes called an undetectable viral load). When put into practice, this means that if you are living with HIV and are on treatment (and taking meds as prescribed) you become less likely to transmit the virus. A lower viral load is important for your overall health and wellbeing, not just for your sex life.
- 4. Your most important sex organ is your brain.** It's not just what is below your waist and in between your legs that counts. Intimacy comes from communication, sharing and letting our partner(s) know we care. Sometimes the best turn-on is a great conversation!
- 5. Meet New People. Be confident.** Confidence is sexy. Introduce yourself to someone new and tell them what you do, or what you are thinking about. Ask them about themselves. Some people will respond; others won't. When you run into someone who doesn't want to talk, don't beat yourself up. Keep moving. Self-confidence, energy, optimism, and a little smile...now that's sexy.
- 6. You are not alone.** Approximately one quarter of the people living with HIV in 2005 were 50 or older, and studies project that by 2015, more than half of all people living with HIV in the US will be over 50. There are terrific resources available for support and information, such as POZ (www.POZ.com) and The Body (www.thebody.com).

Author bio: Terri Clark, MPH, CHES is an accomplished program planner, trainer and facilitator who has been providing education and training for nearly 20 years. She is currently Prevention Coordinator at ActionAIDS in Philadelphia. She also serves as Co-Chair for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Elder Initiative (LGBT EI), whose mission is to advocate for services that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of LGBT seniors. Terri is an adjunct faculty member at Arcadia University. Throughout her career in public health, she has been an advocate for gender and sexual health equality across the lifecycle. Her expertise is in LGBT issues, HIV prevention, and sexuality. Terri can be reached at tclark@actionaids.org or 917-204-7883. Copyright ©2012 Terri Clark