

## Forming relationships

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Relationships can be safe places where we exchange support, love and intimacy. They can also be hard work. For some men the HIV status of their partner is insignificant; for others it is an important factor.

A relationship where your partner is HIV negative has its own unique set of challenges. Initially, there is the issue of disclosing. This may bring up a number of concerns for you both. The fear of transmitting HIV is the obvious one and both of you need to be confident about safe sex guidelines and how you are going to adhere to them. You should both be aware of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), which is a course of medical treatment your partner can take if he is ever accidentally exposed to HIV (see page 16).



Often positive men report that their negative lovers are significant sources of support and will sometimes know more about HIV and treatments than they do. Others find they need to act as their negative partner's counsellor and educator. Either way, it's important both you and your partner receive support from outside the relationship. Friends, counsellors, and negative or positive support groups have proved helpful to many couples.

There may come a time when you need to renegotiate your relationship boundaries in relation to sex. Many couples have introduced creative solutions to satisfy both parties. Is the ongoing relationship more important than being sexually exclusive?

If so, then seeking sexual outlets outside the relationship may be the answer.

Different couples cope differently with emotional issues that may arise when negotiating about the 'rules' of their relationships. Some couples or partners may need outside support from friends or counsellors to help in choosing the most workable arrangements.

Many men are passionate about their personal ways of coping with and treating HIV and these can also be reinforced by having a partner who shares a personal understanding. They can also find that by having a positive lover they have a less anxious sex life.

When two positive men get together there's usually the question of whether to remove condoms from the scene. And many do. There is some evidence that drug [resistant](#) [1]HIV which has mutated and is less susceptible to the effects of one or more anti-HIV drugs is said to be resistant. strains of the [virus](#) [2]A small infective organism which is incapable of reproducing outside a host cell. can be transmitted this way but many positive couples are prepared to risk this for the benefits of added intimacy. (See Reinfection on page 23)

Avoiding other sexually transmitted infections is even more important when both parties have compromised immune systems (see [STIs](#) [3][Sexually Transmissible (or Transmitted) Infection] Infections spread by the transfer of organisms from person to person during sexual contact. Also called venereal disease (VD) (an older public health term) or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). on page 17). Some couples make agreements about sex outside the relationship which aim to minimise the risk of exposure to STIs.

Every relationship is different and achieving a successful one is a challenge with or without HIV. Some positive men find friends and casual partners are satisfying enough. Others are the marrying kind. Enjoying the richness of human relationships, sexual and otherwise, is one of life's great joys. Whatever form they come in.

There are a number of other available resources including ones on positive-negative couples and protecting the rights of same sex relationships with Living Wills and Powers of Attorney. These are available from your local AIDS

"I always fantasised about a positive lover like me. But then I met this guy through friends and when I got strong feelings for him the fantasy went out the window. It's the best relationship I've had."

"I had a positive boyfriend for eight years. After he died I thought that was the end of that part of my life. Then I did a support group – and through that discovered I still had sexual and emotional needs. I've now started a relationship with a positive man – but I don't want to be the widow again and that's affecting our relationship."

"I'm negative and my lover is positive. The biggest hassle is our sex life. I'd like it to be more varied – but he has this huge fear of passing on the virus. I appreciate that – but it doesn't make the sex very spontaneous or mutually satisfactory."

[◀ The disclosure dilemma](#) [4][up](#) [5][Post-exposure prophylaxis \(PEP\)](#) [▶](#) [6]

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/109>

[2] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/125>

[3] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/188>

[4] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/hiv-gay-sex/the-disclosure-dilemma>

[5] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/hiv-gay-sex>

[6] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/hiv-gay-sex/post-exposure-prophylaxis-pep>