Coping Strategies: The initial diagnosis

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People experience a range of emotions when they find out they are HIV positive. Some people may feel shock, anger, horror or disbelief and others may cope better with the news. All of these reactions are completely normal and it helps to remember that you are NOT going to die tomorrow. Many HIV positive people live long and healthy lives.

When you first get the news, some people advise that you don't rush straight out and tell people or make any major life changes such as quitting your job or leaving your partner, husband or wife. It can help to take a few days out to relax and de-stress if you need to. Your doctor should be able to provide you with a medical certificate for work if you need it.

If you do want to talk to your partner, a friend or your family, think about how they might react and if they would be willing to support you. You might have HIV positive friends who could be a good source of support. If you are not sure how your partner, friends or family will react to the news, consider talking to a peer support worker at your local AIDS Council or a counsellor.

Following initial diagnosis, it's useful to make a follow up appointment to see your doctor in the next few days.

You may have more questions or want more information in a week's time. Start making a list of any questions you think of in the next week or two. Some people also decide to undergo another HIV test in the week or two after their diagnosis to be sure that the test is right.

It's important to develop a good relationship with your doctor. You have the right to ask questions and make decisions about your health. If you don't feel comfortable with your doctor for any reason, talk with them about your concerns. If you are still not satisfied, remember you have the right to choose a different doctor who you can trust and feel comfortable with, or if you feel they don't know enough about HIV, ask for a referral to a doctor with more knowledge and experience. Shop around if you need to as having an ongoing and comfortable relationship with a doctor you can trust is important for managing your life as an HIV positive person. The Australasian Society for HIV Medicine [1] (ASHM) can refer you doctors who have done HIV training or who are members of the Society.

Checklist

- You don't need to rush out and tell people straight away
- Make a follow up appointment to see your doctor in a week or two
- Make a list of questions so that you can remember to ask your doctor about these things

Ken: "It was shock. Numbness. The first HIV test I ever had came back positive. I only had the test because a friend suggested it. It felt like the responsible thing to do back in 1985. I look back now and I'm really grateful for the pre and post test counselling – regardless of the result."

‹ Your rights [2]up [3]Life with HIV › [4]

Links:
[1] http://www.ashm.org.au
[2] http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/next-steps/your-rights
[3] http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/next-steps
[4] http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/next-steps/life-with-hiv

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