
Other ways in which HIV can affect your well-being

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Fatigue

One of the common effects of HIV which many women find hardest to deal with is fatigue or chronic tiredness. Feeling tired a lot of the time can make it more difficult to manage under the pressures of everyday life; work, family, partners etc. Fatigue may be caused by the chronic presence of HIV. It may also be caused by damage to your immune system, or by HIV [antiviral](#) [1]A medication or substance which is active against one or more viruses. May include anti-HIV drugs, but these are more accurately termed antiretrovirals. or other treatments. Depression or anxiety may also cause you to feel tired.

Role of diet and exercise

Many women find improved diet and regular exercise can help reduce fatigue. Some [complementary therapies](#) [2]A broad range of healing philosophies, approaches, and therapies that Western (conventional) medicine does not commonly use to promote well-being or treat health conditions. Examples include acupuncture, herbs, Traditional Chinese Medicine, etc. may also help improve your energy levels and sleep. Weight-bearing exercise (exercise which increases the weight stress on your body) is very important for your health, because some ARV's are associated with muscle wasting and bone thinning (HIV itself can also cause wasting).

Weight bearing exercise doesn't have to mean 'pumping iron' in a gym (though if you like doing this, go ahead!) the 'weight' you are working with can be your own body weight. Examples of weight bearing exercises include: yoga, walking, cycling or Pilates. Unfortunately swimming is not in this group, as the water supports your weight.

Weight loss

Because HIV can prevent your body from absorbing food and nutrients, you can easily find you are losing weight particularly if your CD4 count is low. You may also be more likely to get stomach infections, which can cause diarrhoea and weight loss. It is important, as far as possible, to maintain a healthy body weight to help sustain your body's defences against infection. Prevention is the best treatment. Talk to a doctor, and see a dietician, or talk to other positive women about ways to improve your diet and appetite.

Weight gain

While it is important not to be too thin, being overweight increases your risk of lipohypertrophy (abnormal weight gain in the trunk, associated with ARV, particularly some Protease Inhibitors). In addition, being seriously overweight increases your risk of [diabetes](#) [3][Diabetes mellitus] A disorder in which sugars in the diet cannot be metabolised into energy due to a lack of the enzyme insulin. Late-onset diabetes mellitus may be a long-term side effect of some anti-HIV drugs. and heart disease.

Your Body Mass Index (BMI)

Your body mass index (BMI) is a calculation of your body fat based on your height and weight. While it is deemed to be a generally reliable indicator of body fat, it may overestimate body fat in athletes and muscular people and underestimate it in elderly people. A waist measurement of over 35 inches in women, together with a BMI over 25, increases the likelihood of you experiencing diseases such as [high blood pressure](#) [4]Persistently high blood pressure, an outwardly symptomless condition which carries an increased risk of serious illnesses such as stroke, heart disease and heart attack., cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. It is generally agreed that people of certain ethnic backgrounds, including those of Asian heritage, should aim for a BMI below 23.

- Underweight = <18.5
- Normal weight = 18.5-24.9
- Overweight = 25-29.9
- Obesity = BMI of 30 or greater

You can calculate your BMI yourself using one of the websites listed below, or have your doctor calculate it for you.

<http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi/> [5]

www.halls.md/body-mass-index/bmi.htm [6]

Decreasing your risk of cardiovascular disease

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in women in Australia, and medication taken to control HIV may increase your risk. Maintaining your fitness, keeping your BMI below 25 (or 24 for some people) and not smoking are ways that you can significantly reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease.

[◀ How HIV affects your body \(the 'natural history' of HIV\) ▶](#) [7][up](#) [8][You and you doctor: the partnership ▶](#) [9]

- [ANET resources](#)
- [fatigue](#)

Links:

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/123>

[2] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/478>

[3] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/95>

[4] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/98>

[5] <http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>

[6] <http://www.halls.md/body-mass-index/bmi.htm>

[7] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/treat-yourself-right/living-with-hiv-your-health/how-hiv-affects-your-body-the-natural-hist>

[8] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/treat-yourself-right/living-with-hiv-your-health>

[9] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/treat-yourself-right/living-with-hiv-your-health/you-and-you-doctor-the-partnership>