Positive Action

Practice self-help if you're locked up and living with HIV.

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Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) mandates that all inmates with HIV should have access to appropriate medical care, the quality of that treatment varies in different institutions. But many inmates living with HIV can help themselves.

"It's shocking how many of these clients don't know they can better their health by simply utilizing the little that's available to them," says Edwin V. Santana, a peer educator and counseling aide who works as a facilitator for Prisoners for AIDS Counseling and Education (PACE) at Woodbourne Correctional Facility in Woodbourne, New York.

Santana offers the following tips that can help if you're in prison or out:

Eat right. Although the fruits and veggies served in prison dining areas usually come in a can, they still contain nutrients. "You may also want to ask the prison physician to authorize foods consistent with your diet," Santana advises.

Work out. Even if there isn't any exercise equipment in your facility, you can still do push-ups and sit-ups in your cell or cubicle. "Go to the yard and jog a bit," Santana says. "And speed walking is good cardio."

Ask your doc questions. HIV meds may be hard to pronounce and a challenge to take as directed. But don't just swallow pills without understanding how they work. "Ask your doctor about dosages, usage and side effects," Santana suggests. "Even though you're locked up, you still have the right to ask questions."

Educate yourself about the virus. Some facilities have PACE offices or other HIV/AIDS awareness programs. If not, ask a nurse about what's available, or get contact information about community organizations you can write to from your facility's library.

Stay positive. Meditate, use writing as therapy and exercise your mind with brainteasers. Avoid "jailhouse politics and substance abuse," Santana warns, "and if you're hooked, get help so you can quit."

Masturbate. Not only does self-sexing relieve tension and induce gratification, says Santana, “It’s healthy, so don’t be ashamed to indulge.”

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/HIV-prision-care-26866-5990