Stop Singing the HIV Blues

Unaddressed depression can worsen the physical health of people living with the virus, and bring them dangerously close to AIDS.

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Getting depressed is understandable if you've just gotten the news you're HIV positive. But this mental health disorder can also wreak havoc with your physical health and make it harder to stick to your meds.

Research shows that depression can speed up HIV's progression to AIDS. This is why it's so important for people living with HIV to identify and get treatment for depression and any other mental health conditions they experience, say experts at WomensHealth.gov.

Some of the warning signs that may signal depression include feeling sad, emotionally numb, sluggish and lethargic; not sleeping well, or sleeping too much; not being able to concentrate and make decisions; having feelings of guilt, hopelessness and suicide; losing your appetite; overeating; and being disinterested in sex and activities that you previously enjoyed. Also, some HIV symptoms and drug side effects mimic signs of depression.

Once the root cause of your depression is diagnosed, doctors may prescribe talk therapy and antidepressants to treat the problem. But antidepressants may interact with other drugs, so it's critical to let doctors know about all the medicines you regularly take so they can monitor the side effects and any possible interactions.

What's important, says Judith G. Rabkin, PhD, MPH, of the department of psychiatry at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, is that "depression is as treatable in HIV-positive patients as it is in the general population, with equal success rates."

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