

## People over 50 - Newly diagnosed with HIV, part 6



Almost half of people in the United States living with HIV infection are age 50 or over. There are some things to keep in mind. Sexually active older people have the same HIV risk factors as younger people. However, they may know less about HIV than younger people, and may be less likely to protect themselves.

Other factors may increase their risk:

- Erectile dysfunction medications may allow older men to have sex
- Older people may be less likely to use a condom and to practice safer sex.
- Older people are less likely to discuss their sexual habits or drug use with their doctor.

Also, older people may have many health care providers. Each provider maybe aware of only some, but not all, of their physical and mental health needs.



Treating HIV can be more challenging in older persons because of other medical problems. HIV/AIDS can be mistaken for medical conditions or symptoms that become more common with age.

Older people are less likely than younger people to get tested for HIV because they may be ashamed or afraid to seek testing. Doctors do not always think to test older people for HIV/AIDS. So they are more likely to be diagnosed with HIV infection late in their disease. This can lead to poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancy.

Shame about HIV is also a particular concern for older adults and can create barriers to seeking services. Many older adults already have feelings of isolation, due to illness or loss of family and friends. A diagnosis of HIV can increase that sense of isolation. This means that it is especially important to encourage older HIV positive persons to consider support groups and other strategies to help them cope with HIV.



Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about HIV/AIDS. Your public health department, health care provider, and public library can help.

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