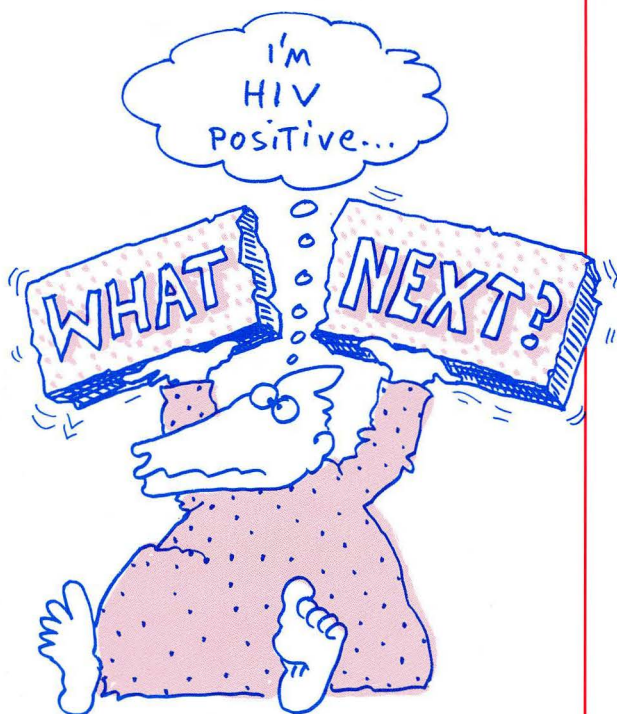




"I decided to take the HIV antibody test because I knew I was at risk of infection. I wanted to be in charge of my body so that I could make intelligent decisions about my health, to play an active role in my future. And for me, that meant knowing my HIV status.

"When I found out that I tested positive, it seemed like the end of the world—but it wasn't. I realized that I was still in charge, that I was very much alive.

**"I BECAME DETERMINED TO
STAY AS HEALTHY AS POSSIBLE."**

GMHC

GAY MEN'S HEALTH CRISIS

Illness is frightening to think about, especially when thinking about your own health. And these days, few illnesses seem more frightening than AIDS. There are so many myths about AIDS and HIV (the human immunodeficiency virus which causes AIDS) that deciding whether or not to take the HIV antibody test can be overwhelming.

Nonetheless, you've taken the test. And, even though you don't currently have any symptoms, you've tested positive for antibodies to HIV. Your mind races from one question to the next.

What does "HIV-positive" mean? Am I going to get AIDS? What are the symptoms? What can I do to keep myself from getting sick? Where do I go for medical treatment and advice? Where do I go for emotional support? What are the legal issues? Whom should I tell? Whom shouldn't I tell? Can I ever have sex again? What should I do next?

While you have every reason to feel confused and even angry, there is reason to be hopeful. Statistics have shown that people who are HIV infected are living longer. AIDS and HIV infection are no longer a sentence of immediate death. Although no cure exists now, many experts feel that HIV infection will become a chronic, manageable condition. Treatments for various HIV-related infections are available, and many more are on the way.

Although we can't tell you everything to do or to expect, here are a few things that you can do

Being HIV-positive does not necessarily mean that you will develop AIDS in the near future.

More people are getting better treatment early, and survival rates are increasing.

Plan for the long term.



Being HIV-positive means that you have developed antibodies to HIV. It does not necessarily mean that you now have AIDS or even that you will develop AIDS in the near future. Because AIDS has been with us for less than ten years, we don't yet know how long a person can be infected with HIV and not show any symptoms. And as more people get better treatment earlier, survival rates are increasing. Statistics and percentages are changing. Just because you're HIV-positive doesn't mean that you'll get sick tomorrow, or next month, or next year. It is important to recognize that there are more and more long-term survivors, and we are learning about living with HIV infection from them. It is in your best interest to get on with life and plan for the long haul.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

You can be HIV-positive and have no symptoms. Still, it is important to know what the symptoms of HIV are:

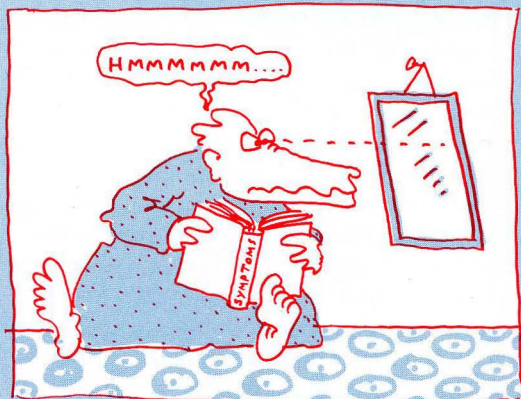
- ▼ A sudden, drastic weight loss
- ▼ Feeling tired all the time
- ▼ Swollen and painful lymph nodes
- ▼ Thrush – a thick, whitish coating on the tongue or throat
- ▼ Fevers that won't go away
- ▼ A dry, nagging cough
- ▼ Diarrhea that won't go away.

If you have these symptoms, it doesn't always mean that you have AIDS or ARC. These are common symptoms of many other diseases as well. If you have any of these symptoms for more than two weeks, you should check with a doctor or healthcare provider.

And remember: the earlier you detect an infection, the greater your chances are of getting better again soon. For more information, you might want to get a copy of GMHC's *Medical Answers About AIDS*, or call the GMHC HOTLINE at 212-807-6655/TDD 212-645-7470 for the hearing impaired.

Know what the symptoms are.

**The sooner you treat an infection,
the better your chances.**



It is important to get hooked up with a healthcare provider who you feel comfortable with and who is familiar with HIV-related issues.

**Take care of your immune system—
even when you feel well.**



WHAT TO DO NOW

If you don't already have a doctor or healthcare provider, it's important to find one. How do you do this? Ask your friends or other people you know who are HIV-positive, or call the GMHC HOTLINE at 212-807-6655/TDD 212-645-7470 for the hearing impaired. The hotline can refer you to someone. If you can't afford the services of a private doctor, the hotline can refer you to someone whose fees are based on a sliding scale.

Your relationship with your healthcare provider will be long term, so you'll want to find someone you can trust, someone who makes you feel comfortable. It might be worthwhile finding out if your doctor treats many people who are HIV-positive and has experience in dealing with HIV and HIV-related issues. Hopping from one doctor to another makes it difficult to get good care. That's why it's a good idea to look around before you make a choice. But if you feel dissatisfied, don't hesitate to talk to your doctor about what you need. If you're still unhappy, change doctors. Be a smart shopper and choose your healthcare wisely and cautiously.

Once you've decided on a doctor, it's important to take an active role in the relationship. The more you know about current treatments and about how to stay healthy, the more you'll understand your doctor's suggestions about what to do – and what not to do.

If you have questions, write them down ahead of time, so that you don't forget to ask them. And make sure the doctor talks to you in language that you can understand. Don't be afraid to ask what something means. You have a right to know.

Most people in the early stages of HIV infection don't show any symptoms. This means your immune system can be in danger and you might not know it. Some doctors and healthcare providers may suggest you begin certain medications and treatments even though you feel well. They will also want to keep an eye on how your immune system is working. This is very important. If your healthcare provider keeps track of your immune system, you'll have a much better chance of staying healthy.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

It is your right to know as much about this disease as there is to be known, and you should keep exercising that right in your efforts to stay well.

You should know how HIV is passed from one person to another and how to reduce your risk of infecting others or infecting yourself again. This means learning about safer sex and about cleaning needles and works. Find out, too, about your legal and civil rights, such as the right to have your medical records remain confidential.

Become your own best expert. Subscribe to as many AIDS-oriented newsletters and magazines as you possibly can. Many are provided free of charge, or at reduced rates, to people who are HIV-positive. (Check the list below.) There is no single perspective – medical, political or otherwise – when it comes to HIV infection. Newsletters will provide you with different points of view, some of which may suit your specific needs better than others.

Here are a few that you might look into:

TREATMENT ISSUES

GMHC Dept. of Medical Information
129 West 20th Street
New York, New York 10011
212-807-6655

BODY POSITIVE

263A West 19th Street, Room 107
New York, New York 10011
212-633-1782

PWA COALITION NEWSLINE

31 West 26th Street, 5th Floor
New York, New York 10010
212-532-0568

P.I. PERSPECTIVE

Project Inform
347 Dolores Street, Suite 301
San Francisco, California 94110
1-800-822-7422 (national)
1-800-334-7422 (California)

Educate yourself about HIV infection.



In addition to newsletters, there are a number of hotlines and networks that provide AIDS-related information. Always keep these numbers on hand in case you need a question answered.

Gay Men's Health Crisis develops and distributes materials that address the various aspects of AIDS (general information, risk reduction, medical and psychological issues, testing, health insurance and legal concerns) to meet the needs of different audiences. It conducts public forums, seminars for health care professionals, workshops for people at risk and educational research programs.

GMHC also provides support services for people with AIDS, which include crisis intervention counseling, our "buddy" program (helping with daily living tasks), recreational programs, the pediatrics program, support and therapy groups (for people with AIDS and their care partners) and legal, financial and health care advocacy.

We need your support. Any contribution of time or money will help GMHC to continue these programs. If you wish to volunteer, call our Volunteer Office at 212-337-3593.

All contributions to GMHC are tax deductible. A copy of the latest financial report filed with the Department of State may be obtained by writing to either the New York State Dept. of State, Office of Charities Regulation, Albany, NY 12231 or Gay Men's Health Crisis, Inc., 129 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011.

HOTLINE 212-807-6655

TDD 212-645-7470 (for the hearing impaired)



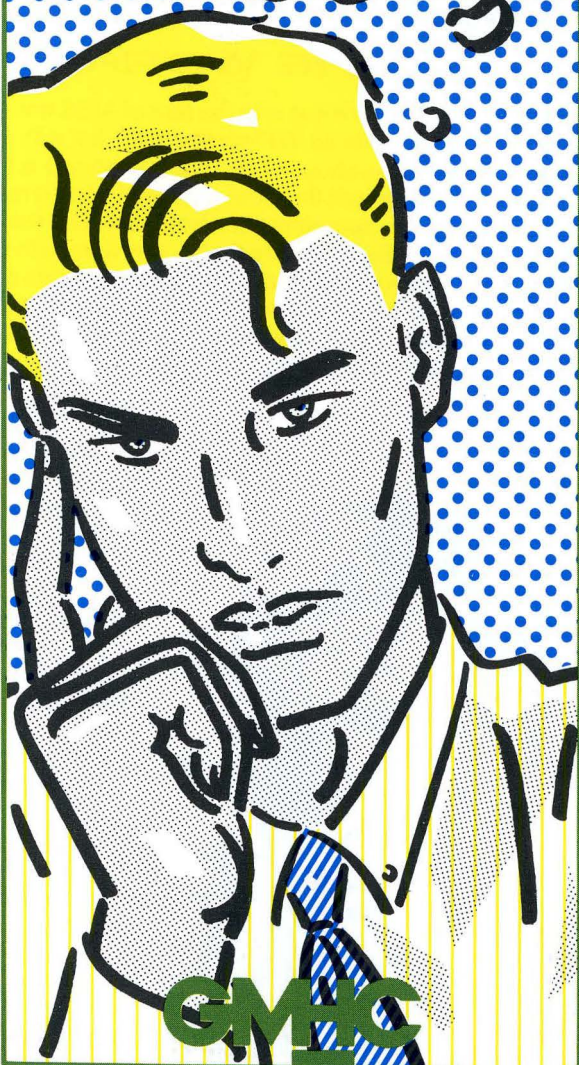
Written by David Austin

Illustrations by Don Herron

Layout Design by Michael Sabanosb

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**I CAN'T
COPE
WITH MY
FEAR
OF AIDS**



GMHC

PUBLICATIONS

the gym, or other physical exercises may bring you calm.

Get medical insurance.

If you are presently insured, have your policy reviewed by an insurance professional.

Give yourself permission to be afraid.

AIDS is frightening. Not to be concerned about it, if you're at risk, may be cause for worry in itself.

Assess your emotional supports—friends, family, and community.

Do whatever is necessary to strengthen and increase those supports.

Consider volunteering for an AIDS organization.

Facing your fear directly is a good way for some people to cope.

Increase what is joyful to you.

ENJOYING YOUR LIFE DESPITE AIDS

Look closely at your life. What is satisfying and what is not. Sit down, right now, and make a list with two columns, one for enjoyable activities, labeled "healthy," the other for things you find taxing, labeled "unhealthy." Then write down all your daily activities under the appropriate heading. *You* define what is healthy or unhealthy about *yourself*.

Next, compare the "healthy" and "unhealthy" columns. Which column has the most items? Now do whatever is necessary to be sure that this list is weighted in favor of the healthy column. This list should be reviewed and updated weekly.

IF THESE SUGGESTIONS HAVE NOT HELPED

If these suggestions seem difficult to follow, or even to consider, or if they have been tried and have not helped your "symptoms," then another approach may be needed. Though you may feel emotionally alone, you are still part of the larger community and can use community resources.

Throughout the country, numerous AIDS community organizations have been formed in response to this health emergency. Many of these groups offer counseling themselves or can refer you to a private



practitioner who is skilled in helping the worried well. Anyone can use these services. You do not have to be gay, bisexual, or an I.V. drug user to receive services from these organizations.

AIDS fear or the actual occurrence of AIDS may stir deeper emotional problems than we have talked about here. Sometimes stress, caused by current fears, awakens old issues that need to be looked at with more attention.

The struggle to know more about yourself is often difficult. During this health emergency, no one should be afraid to ask for help.

GMHC's Hotline provides on-the-phone counseling, current AIDS information, and referrals to health care professionals, outside agencies, and in-house divisions of GMHC.

Gay Men's Health Crisis Hotline: 212-807-6655

Gay Men's Health Crisis provides support services for all people with AIDS, which includes crisis intervention counseling, our "buddy" program (helping with daily living tasks), recreational programs, pediatrics program, support and therapy groups (for people with AIDS and their care partners), and legal, financial, and health care advocacy.

GMHC develops and distributes materials that address the various aspects of AIDS (general information, risk reduction, medical and psychological issues, testing, health insurance, legal concerns, etc.) to fulfill the needs of different audiences. It conducts public forums seminars for health care professionals, workshops for people at risk, and education research programs.

If you wish to volunteer, call our volunteer office at 212-807-6572.

All contributions to GMHC are tax deductible. A copy of the latest financial report filed with the Department of State may be obtained by writing to either: New York State Department of State, Office of Charities Regulation, Albany, NY 12231 or

GMHC

Box 274
132 West 24th Street
New York, NY 10011

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Illustrations by Robert Passantino
Art Direction by Andrew Flynn

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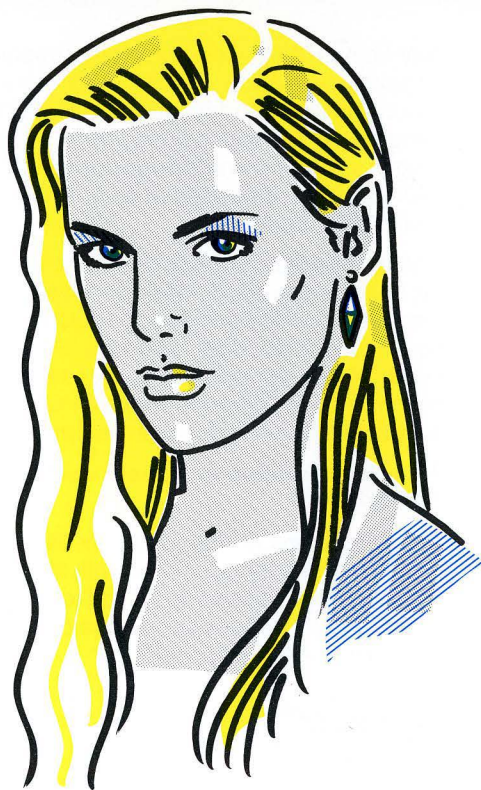
STRATEGIES FOR THE "WORRIED WELL"

The AIDS epidemic is full of uncertainties, unanswered questions and unspoken fears. It affects not only people diagnosed with AIDS or ARC, but also gay and bisexual men, hemophiliacs, people who have a history of using drugs intravenously, people who have had blood transfusions in the last few years, and people unsure of the sexual or drug experiences of their partners.

Many of us are physically well yet troubled that we might have AIDS, been infected with the AIDS virus, or, as carriers, be passing the virus to our sexual partners, spouses or unborn children.

"THE WORRIED WELL"

Physically well people living with the fear of AIDS and the fear of getting it have been referred to as the "worried well", but with newspapers carrying daily stories about AIDS, nearly everyone is frightened and concerned however well they feel. This fear is often reasonable—an emotional call to do something concrete to reduce the actual danger of contracting AIDS. But there are those of us among the "worried well" who think so much about AIDS that worry itself becomes a central part of our lives. Some of us may not even be aware of worrying, but our behavior shows the effects of fear, anxiety, or depression; we lead lives that are sad, joyless, and unsatisfying.



AIDS FEAR

Maybe you or someone you know has expressed feelings like these:

"I'm afraid to make new friends. They may not be around long."

"Every time I get a cold or a sore throat, I think it's AIDS."

"I haven't had sex for three years."

"I can't sleep at all from fear that I might have picked something up and given it to my wife."

"I thought I worked out all those fears when I was coming out. But now I'm beginning to think that being gay is wrong."

"I'm so afraid I have AIDS I can't do my work."

"I just found out that my husband shared needles in 1983, and I can't sleep or eat."

"What's the point in planning for the future."

Feelings like these are typical of someone who has AIDS fears. These fears can cause identity changes affecting our perceptions of ourselves and our world. Fortunately, when we admit our fears, active measures to win back good feelings can be started.



SYMPTOMS OF AIDS FEAR

Here is a list of some "symptoms" of AIDS fear. They are offered as a guide for your own "self-diagnosis."

Once sexually active, you decide that the only way to be safe from AIDS is to stop having sex completely.

You're simply not interested in having sex anymore, your sex drive is greatly reduced, or you begin to have sexual difficulties.

You aren't as social as you once were, or you spend more time alone, and you don't enjoy it.

Out of fear of contracting AIDS, you stop seeing gay or bisexual friends and don't participate in activities of the gay and bisexual community.

You are sad, anxious, depressed for no apparent reason.

You can't sleep, have nightmares, or lose your appetite without an apparent cause.

You find yourself constantly worrying about your health and refuse to believe your physician's assurances that any medical conditions you might have are not AIDS-related, or you refuse to believe the negative results of an HIV antibody test.

You begin to think that there is something wrong with being gay or bisexual.

You blame yourself for having had lovers who were gay or bisexual or intravenous drug users.

You feel guilty about your history of intravenous drug use.

You develop physical symptoms that you have heard are signs of AIDS, such as night sweats or seemingly unexplainable weight loss.

You experience strong feelings of regret or guilt over past sexual behavior.

To qualify as a "symptom" of AIDS fear, changes in your behavior or attitude must have occurred after you knew that AIDS existed. This may have been only a few months ago or as long as five years ago, when AIDS was first reported. If you have always had difficulty sleeping or sex was never a very important part of your life, and you have no other symptoms of AIDS fear, you don't need to be concerned.

Sometimes "symptoms" like those listed above may occur without even thinking about AIDS. The mental process called "denial" keeps away thoughts too troubling to face. You may be worrying about AIDS without recognizing it.



WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT AIDS FEAR?

The kinds of feelings and behavior to be concerned about are those that do not help us deal with the reality of AIDS but are an irrational, self-defeating response to it.

If you have identified yourself as a person suffering from these kinds of feelings, what can you do? The hardest task may be over; recognizing the effects of AIDS fear is often the most difficult part of the battle. In fact, being aware may help you to find other ways to reduce your fears. Also, it may be a relief for you to know that you are not alone in feeling the way that you do. AIDS organizations, physicians, and therapists around the country report that thousands of people are experiencing AIDS fear.

Now consider the following:

Combat your worry with information.

If you have AIDS symptoms, or think you do, get a complete medical check-up from a physician who is familiar with AIDS, ARC, and HIV infections.

Reduce your risk of contracting AIDS.

Practice safer sex: Safer sex guidelines are for everyone—men and women; gay, bisexual, and heterosexual—and are available through local AIDS organizations, such as GMHC. Learn them, put them into practice and continue to enjoy sex. Since the lack of sex could be stressful, resume your sex life—joyfully, safely and intelligently.

If you use drugs intravenously, be sure to use clean needles (works, spikes) and do not share them or other drug paraphernalia.

Take charge and improve your health. Help your body resist infection.

Reduce your alcohol, drug and tobacco intake. Eat a balanced diet.

Identify and reduce the stress in your home and work life. Learn to relax.

Simple breathing exercises, regular workouts at