



# Live Healthy Georgia

## Seniors Taking Charge

### Older Adults and AIDS

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This month we are going to focus on HIV/AIDS, a topic that often goes unmentioned in the context of older adults but is becoming ever more important as treatments become more advanced, more adults are living with HIV. HIV can compress the aging process and accelerate illness in those of any age. We will describe the disease and how to protect yourself against it, symptoms, and other support resources.

#### **What is HIV/AIDS?**

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that damages the immune system, your body's defense system against most illness. Infection with the virus can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) which occurs when HIV has weakened the immune system to the point that other diseases, infections, or cancers become life threatening.

#### **Risk Factors and Symptoms**

Risk factors including unprotected sex, drug use, and lack of knowledge

are similar to any other population. Many doctors do not bring up AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases in routine check ups with older adults, so be sure to tell you doctor if you are sexually active. Those who do have the virus may have no symptoms for an extended period of time. Minor flu-like symptoms including cough, diarrhea, lack of energy, loss of appetite, weight loss.

#### **Depression and HIV/AIDS**

The onset of serious diseases like HIV can lead to depression. Older adults may be particularly susceptible to this because they may not have a strong network of friends to help support them. Other diseases such as diabetes or heart disease can exacerbate the isolation that can come with HIV. Depression can be fought by finding support such as emotional help, transportation, or just having a friend who aids with everyday tasks.

## **Spotlight on Support – AID Atlanta**

AID Atlanta is a non-profit organization dedicated to HIV prevention, education, and supporting those in the Atlanta area living with the virus. Their services include case management for those who have tested positive, counseling services, risk reduction, HIV education workshops, STD information, and screening referral.

For more information regarding AID Atlanta's HIV Testing Program or to speak directly to the Testing and Counseling Specialist, please call (800) 551-2728 or (404) 870-7775 (Georgia AIDS & STD Infoline).

## **Clinical Trials**

Treatment for HIV has come a long way. New methods are currently in the pipeline and could provide the basis for the next breakthrough in beating this disease. Talk to your physician and discuss if inclusion in clinical trials is right for your care. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has a website to search from a database of clinical trials.  
<http://www.aidsinfo.nih.gov/ClinicalTrials/Default.aspx>

## **FAQs**

*Is HIV spread by kissing?*

There is no significant evidence showing that HIV is transmitted by saliva, although this does not rule out some other sexually transmitted diseases.

*Are All Condoms Safe?*

Latex condoms are the most effective at preventing HIV transmission. Natural skin or animal skin condoms do not prevent HIV transmission.

*Which body fluids transmit HIV and which ones don't?*

Saliva, sweat, tears, and urine do not transmit HIV. Semen, blood, and vaginal fluids do transmit HIV.

## **Other Resources**

National Institute on Aging: HIV, AIDS and Older People

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/hiv-aids.htm>

AIDSinfo (USDHHS)

<http://www.aidsinfo.nih.gov/>

AID Atlanta

<http://www.aidatlanta.org/>

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