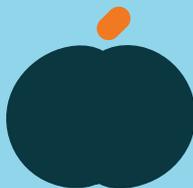


HIV treatment centre Amsterdam UMC



VUmc location

Treatment guide

For optimal quality of life with HIV

Welcome to the HIV treatment centre at Amsterdam UMC, VUmc location. Nowadays, HIV is a treatable chronic disease. The HIV centre employs specialised doctors and clinical nurse practitioners. You will be treated by a team of both. This document contains concise information about the treatment and how you can work towards a healthy life with HIV. It also lists websites that you can visit for more information.

What is HIV?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. If HIV is not treated, it breaks down the immune system step-by-step. The immune system defends the body against infection, allowing viruses and bacteria less of a chance of making it sick. HIV breaks down the CD4 cells, or T cells, which play a major role in the immune system. If your immune system is broken down, you may become seriously ill from a disease that would normally not affect you much, such as the flu or pneumonia. If your immune system is so weak that it can no longer protect your body, the disease is called AIDS. There is no cure for HIV yet, but it is easy to control with medication.

Hiv-treatment



During your HIV treatment at the outpatient clinic, your consultation with your attending doctor and your clinical nurse practitioner are paramount. Together, you will discuss the treatment and various options.

Medication

The HIV treatment regime consists of taking a combination of HIV medication called antiretroviral therapy (ART) or HIV-inhibitors. This medication must be taken once a day at a fixed time. This is important for the treatment to succeed. The goal of the therapy is to suppress the virus. We measure the amount of virus in the blood—the Viral Load. If the virus is well suppressed by the medication and no longer detectable in your blood, it is called an 'undetectable' viral load. To ensure you continue taking the medication, choose a fixed time in the day when it is best for you to take the medication. During the consultation we will discuss how you can best decide on when to take the medication.

Monitoring and checkups

During your HIV treatment it is important that your blood is monitored. Besides measuring the viral load, it is also important to measure the immune cells in your blood, especially at the beginning of the treatment. These are called CD4 cells. Other values in the blood are also measured to see if your body is doing well during therapy.

There is always room to discuss any questions and wishes during your consultations with your doctor or nurse practitioner.

Once the right balance of medication has been determined, you will only need to visit the outpatient clinic for checkups twice a year. Two weeks prior to each checkup, you will receive a blood test. The result of the blood test will be discussed during the checkup.

Topics:

- *contact with practitioner*
- *the results of your blood test*
- *possible side effects*
- *doctor and nurse practitioner*
- *when to take your medication*
- *other medication use*

Mental health



You often feel healthier when you feel good about yourself. Mental well-being plays an important role in this so it is important to pay attention to your state of mind. Does HIV have a big impact on your life? Does it have an impact on your well-being? Do you have friends or family you can talk to, or do you need someone else you can talk to and share your experiences with HIV with? Your practitioners will discuss this during the consultation. Sometimes it is easier to deal with a situation if you are not alone. Tell your practitioners how you feel. They can work with you to find a suitable solution to help you achieve more stability in your mental health.

Your practitioners will work together with psychologists and psychiatrists from GGZ Ingeest, a knowledge centre for HIV and psychological symptoms. A referral can be easily arranged and the care providers all have experience with HIV patients. They also work together with organisations that organise contact with other HIV-positive individuals.

Topics:

- *well-being*
- *stigma*
- *contact with other HIV-positive individuals*
- *the impact of HIV on life*
- *acceptance*
- *psychological complaints*

Lifestyle



In addition to taking your HIV medications, a healthy lifestyle is important to your overall health and well-being. This topic will therefore be discussed at your consultations with your doctor and nurse practitioner. The most important items are listed below.

Nutrition

A healthy and varied diet is important for everyone. By choosing food that contributes to a healthy lifestyle, your body can become more resilient. Your body needs vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and proteins, the building blocks of a healthy immune system. This is easy to extract from fresh products such as vegetables, fruit, meat and fish. If you need tips, just ask!

Exercise

Exercise strengthens your muscles and bones and improves your overall level of physical and mental well-being. It reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. It is good for your weight, blood pressure and cholesterol. You feel fitter and sleep better. Exercise also gives you more energy. Sport and exercise help you to relax and reduces stress. Exercise also helps when you are feeling gloomy, and can help with anxiety and depression.

Avoid stress

Stress can have a significant impact on your well-being. People de-stress in different ways. For some, mindfulness or meditation can contribute to a better life balance. Others might prefer running, walking or an intensive workout at the gym. Let us know how you de-stress.

Smoking, alcohol, drugs

These three stimulants often present a challenge for a healthy lifestyle. How do you cope with this?

Topics:

- *nutrition*
 - *work*
 - *relaxation*
 - *sport*
 - *housing*
 - *stimulants*
 - *exercise*
 - *travel*
-

Sexual health



Sexuality, relationships, a desire to have children (or lack thereof)? HIV positive and your partner isn't? How do you deal with this? How do you protect yourself from other STIs or how can you open yourself up to relationships or sexual contacts again after being diagnosed with HIV?

Current medication allows women to become pregnant naturally and have a healthy baby. By taking the medication as instructed, you are protecting yourself and others. Yourself, by not getting sick from HIV. And others, because you can no longer transmit the virus to others if you take your medication correctly. Studies have shown that the risk of transmitting the virus when using medication correctly is negligible.

The above topics will all be addressed during your consultation. If you have any questions feel free to ask, there is no such thing as an awkward or silly question. Please let us know what is on your mind. Your practitioners can contribute to your thought process and help you on your way to healthy sexuality.

Topics:

- *safe sex*
 - *contraception*
 - *informing partners*
 - *PEP/PrEP*
 - *becoming pregnant*
 - *using chems*
 - *U=U (Undetectable is Untransferable)*
 - *sexual dysfunction*
-

Screening, prevention and treatment of other diseases



In addition to the HIV treatment, we focus on the prevention and treatment of other conditions as well. This includes checking your cholesterol and blood pressure, as well as the risk of cardiovascular disease in the future. Maintaining strong bones is also important. Your blood is checked for vitamin D, which is important for bone maintenance and development. Women are checked for cervical cancer and, in the event of complaints, men are checked for anal cancer. You may be referred to a general practitioner, AIN consultation at the AMC or a gynaecologist for these tests.

Topics:

- *vaccinations*
- *STI screening*
- *screening for risk of cardiovascular diseases*
- *screening for osteoporosis*
- *screening for cervical or anal cancer*

If you are diagnosed with another disease in addition to HIV or you know that you have a pre-existing condition, your HIV practitioner can also treat other infectious diseases. These include hepatitis, tuberculosis or other infections such as pneumonia, gastrointestinal infection caused by bacteria, or a sexually transmitted disease (STI).

If you have complaints your HIV practitioner cannot help you with, they will refer you to your GP or another specialist. If you have any complaints, please let us know and we will discuss the best method of treatment.

Useful websites

Visit the Centres for Disease Control website for reliable information on living with HIV, treatment, mental health and much more:

www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics

Visit the Shiva website to find your own way in living an HIV-positive life. For women and men:

www.shiva-positief.nl

Visit the EatRight website for reliable information on nutrition and healthy food choices:

www.eatright.org

Visit the Mainline website for more information on drugs and health:

www.mainline.nl (choose international)

Visit the website of GGZ Ingeest HIV and Psychological Symptoms for more information about treating psychological symptoms (website in Dutch):

www.ggzingeest.nl/wat-heb-ik/hiv-en-psychische-problemen

Visit the Zanzu website to get to know more about your body and sexual health:

www.zanzu.nl

Visit the GGD Amsterdam STI outpatient clinic website for appointments, informing partners and information about treating STIs:

www.ggd.amsterdam.nl/english/sti-hiv-sense
