



Ten Things You Can Do to Enhance Your Emotional Well-Being if you are HIV +

By J. Buzz von Ornsteiner, Ph.D.



1. **Build a strong, supportive, trusting relationship with an HIV/AIDS doctor.** You should be able to freely discuss everything and anything and, if needed, to challenge your doctor's advice.
2. **Develop consistent contact with a health care case manager** who can help to make the rocky road to benefits and services easier for you. One mold does not fit all, so try to find a case manager that you trust, even if you have to switch to a new one.
3. **Join an HIV/AIDS support group.** Find out if they use an ongoing, drop-in format or if they are time-limited and require pre-enrollment. Also find out about the training and qualifications of the group leaders.
4. **Get a therapist,** preferably a good licensed psychologist or certified social worker. Remember anyone can state they are a "therapist"; request more information about their background and experience. Keep looking until your instincts tell you that you have found a good match.
5. **Attend workshops or other HIV/AIDS events** so that you can find out as much as you can about HIV/AIDS. You must be the expert on this disease and be on top of any new developments and programs.
6. **Stay informed about your HIV/AIDS medications** by seeking out information from any and all sources, including people, Web sites, and periodicals. The more you know about the medication you are taking and its potential side effects, the more you know what to expect about your emotions and mental well-being.
7. **Address any substance use issues you may have** by looking into substance use programs and groups. Consider working towards being clean and sober.
8. **Exercise regularly and maintain good nutrition** because the mind and the body are closely linked, and physical health enhances mental health.
9. **Work if you can** for income but also work for the structure and well being that employment can provide. Everyone can benefit from structure, and we all need to feel we are productive members of this world.
10. **Seek a sense of belonging outside of HIV/AIDS** such as by starting a hobby, traveling and exploring, getting a pet, starting or finishing school, or volunteering. The bottom line is to keep your stress low; keeping your stress low will help you to keep your immune system high.