

Taking Charge of Your Health WHAT CAN YOU DO?

A Ten-Point Plan for People Who Test HIV+

By Darren Main

I stopped eating red meat at the age of seventeen and became a vegetarian at the age of twenty. I started practicing yoga and meditation at the age of eighteen right after I stopped drinking and doing drugs. I quit smoking when I was nineteen.

For most of my adult life I was the annoying health nut at family gatherings. While others were drinking beer, I was drinking water. While most in my family were smoking and drinking coffee, I was biking, hiking and standing on my head.

As a yoga and meditation teacher and a gay man living in San Francisco, I worked largely with the HIV community helping people with HIV use natural therapies in conjunction with traditional Western medicine to keep their immune systems strong and to counter side effects of potent HIV medications.

Like many young gay men who are lucky enough to be negative, I was arrogant and really took my health for granted. Then, on February 17, 2000 I got the news that I was HIV+.

Although my health was good, I found myself in an emotional tailspin and even though I knew, from years of healthy living, what I needed to do to support my body, I couldn't seem to focus long enough to know what to eat,

what vitamins to take or what I needed to do to keep myself well. In spite of all the good advice I had been handing out to others in my situation, I now had no idea what to do—I didn't know where to begin.

Finally, after a few weeks of calming myself down, talking with friends and family, and finding my center, I sat down with my journal in hand and came up with a ten-point plan for keeping myself well. I needed to keep things simple in my life and having ten things that I could do consistently seemed manageable.

That ten-point plan is something that I have shared with many friends and yoga students who have discovered

they are HIV+, and many have found that, in addition to Western medicine, these simple things have really made a difference. I hope they will help you as well.

1 **Develop a meditation practice.** The first thing I recommend a person do when they test HIV+ is to meditate. If they don't know how, I teach them or recommend that they learn from someone in their area. The mind can be the greatest enemy or the greatest ally in the quest for health. Learning to quiet the ego mind will help a person make more rational decisions about their health, their diet and their future, while at the same time giving the body the space it needs to find balance and wholeness. Meditation is really the foundation on which all the other steps I have listed here are built.

2 **Eat well.** Eating well is so important to good health. To keep the body healthy you need to give it the proper tools to fight off disease and repair itself. Unfortunately, the typical American diet is a double-edged sword. Not only does it lack in essential nutrients, it is also quite toxic. Because most American diets are high in fat, and loaded with pesticides, hormones, and artificial flavors and



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preservatives, we are actually doing great harm to our bodies when we eat that way. For many who are HIV+ a significant change in diet may be in order. This is never easy, but it is very important to good health. These changes don't have to be overnight, but having a plan will really help.

I recommend considering a vegetarian diet or at least one that is low in animal fats. I also recommend a lower fat diet that includes a lot of fresh organic produce. Cutting out refined sugar and dairy can be very helpful as well. I also suggest that you abstain from eating three hours before going to bed. There are many great books on healthy eating when you are HIV+, but I especially like *Nutrition and HIV* by Mary Romeyn M.D.

3 Practice Hatha yoga. Hatha yoga is one of the best forms of exercise available. It keeps the muscles strong and limber and helps to cleanse the internal organs. It also helps to raise body awareness and reduces the severity of the side effects that many people experience as a result of being on drug cocktails. Most importantly, Hatha yoga poses do wonders for the immune system.

4 Take supplements. Even with a good diet, it is not always easy to get the right nutrients. Taking supplements is a great way to give your body everything it needs to stay healthy. There are many supplements out there, and some you will not easily find in your diet. Herbs, for example, are something you may want to take. It is a good idea to talk with a nutritionist or an herbalist when deciding what to take. A great reference book is Earl Mendel's *Supplement Bible*.

5 Cleanse the body. We live in a toxic world, and many of the drugs that are given for HIV are toxic as well. Even if you are living a very clean life, it is impossible to avoid this toxicity. There are many cleansing things you can do to help clear your body. Not all of

them will be right for you, but it is wise to find a system that fits your needs. Some popular examples of detoxing are juice fasting, colonics, mono fasting, colon cleansing and deep sweating in a sauna or steam room. You should always check with your health care provider before engaging in a cleanse to make sure it is suitable for you.

6 Get regular bodywork. Massage is often thought of as a luxury, but it is so helpful to good health. There are many types of bodywork that range from relaxing Swedish massage to deep tissue work. There is energy work, acupuncture and chiropractic as well. Finding a style that feels therapeutic to you is the key. The frequency of your bodywork sessions is up to you, but I recommend at least once per month.

7 Go on retreat. If you have never been on a retreat, you owe it to yourself to do so. It is a time to regroup and recommit to your health and your spiritual center. By removing yourself from your day-to-day life, you have the opportunity to see things from a new and more lucid perspective. There are many types of retreats to choose from—silent meditation retreats, yoga retreats, natural hot springs and spas, and retreats to various religious centers. Look around and choose one that is good for you. I recommend you go on at least one week-long retreat and several weekend retreats per year.

8 Abstain from drugs, alcohol, caffeine and nicotine. If you like to party or start your day with a hot cup of coffee, I can't recommend strongly enough that you let go of these habits. Drinking, drugs, caffeine and nicotine are poison to the immune system. Even their casual use can wreak havoc on the body. Letting go of these things, while difficult, is very important to living well with HIV. To some this may seem like a sacrifice, but if you think about it, it is a much bigger sacrifice to continually beat up your immune system when a virus is already attacking it. You don't

need to let go of all your vices all at once. Take a year to let go of one bad habit per month, and as they say in the twelve-step programs, Let go of them in the order they are killing you.

9 Sleep well. Sleeping well is the best way to give your body what it needs to stay healthy. If you like to live on only a few hours of sleep per night, supplementing your sleep with caffeine, you are putting a lot of undue stress on your system. Try to sleep seven or eight hours every night, and take naps throughout the day if you feel tired. Sleep is the time when your body repairs itself and strengthens the immune system. Give your body all it needs. It is also very helpful to have a set bedtime and a set wake up time every day. This will help your body to get the most from sleep.

10 Don't plan your funeral. Looking at lab results and living with the side effects of HIV medications (if you choose to take them) can be quite depressing. It is easy to give up on life. Try not to let your mind go there. Clean healthy living will go a long way to keeping your body and mind healthy. If you find your mind dwelling on funeral plans and other depressing thoughts, do something good for yourself. Cook a healthy meal, take a yoga class, or sit in a hot tub. If you are in a real rut, get away for a retreat. Do whatever it takes to keep that positive attitude. It may well be the difference between a long healthy life and a life of chronic illness.

Darren Main is a well-known yoga and meditation instructor and author. His books include *Yoga and the Path of the Urban Mystic*, *Spiritual Journeys along the Yellow Brick Road* and *The Findhorn Book of Meditation*. In addition to his writing, he facilitates workshops and gives talks on yoga and modern spirituality throughout the United States and abroad. He currently lives in San Francisco. Visit his website at www.darrenmain.com

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Learn about your body...

What Are We Made Of?

By Andrea Alloway, MS, RD

For those with HIV it is particularly important to test your body composition to determine if there is any wasting of fat or muscle tissue over time. Although modern medicine has reduced the incidence of HIV wasting, we still see it, and therefore feel it is important to monitor for body composition changes and intervene with nutrition, exercise, and through medical intervention.

Your body is made up of fat, muscle tissue, fluid, bone, and blood plasma. All of these body parts account for your overall body composition. To accurately test your body composition, we use a machine called a Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis, or BIA for short.

One BIA test can determine what your composition is that day, but may not tell us what has been going on with your body composition over the past year or two. Ideally we would be testing 1 time per year to look for any changes in your body composition that you may not otherwise notice.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BIA AND A BMI TEST?

BMI is a calculation based on a person's height and weight (weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared). This calculation can determine health risk in most people, but does not take into consideration the patient's body composition. Those with a BMI between 18.5-24.9 are considered low risk, 25-29.9 moderate risk, and 30+ obese or high risk. The risk is for heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and other weight related health issues. BIA is a test that runs a low grade electrical current through the body to determine resistance and reactance of that current against the body tissues in your body.



This can tell us with a good degree of accuracy what your body composition is.

WHAT CAN THE BIA TELL ME THAT A BMI CANNOT?

If you are a particularly muscular person, you may have a higher BMI. Why? Muscle weighs more than fat. You may be in the category of moderate or even high risk on the BMI chart, but based on your BIA, we may be able to rule out your risk if the results show a lower % of body fat. Another scenario might be someone who is sedentary or inactive, and weighs a normal body weight. A BMI might show the person is at low risk, but a BIA might indicate that the person has a high amount of fat mass and a low amount of muscle mass, which would indicate that lifestyle and dietary changes need to be made.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I HAVE THE TEST DONE?

- Newly diagnosed HIV+.
- Stable HIV+ who have never had a BIA before.
- Follow up tests should be done one time per year for stable members.

- If there are any noticeable changes in body weight or body or a sense by the client that the body composition is changing. Ideally, you would have been tested prior to this for a baseline, but this is not always possible.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IF THE TEST IS ABNORMAL?

If the test shows that there is a high amount of body fat, I usually discuss exercise habits and goals and would make suggestions on ways to lower body fat. To lower body fat, increasing cardiovascular exercise such as running, aerobics, cycling, swimming might be helpful. I would also analyze the patient's dietary habits for ways to decrease fat calories or sugar calories that may be contributing to the excess fat. If the test shows a low BCM (Body Cell Mass), which includes muscle mass, I would recommend an increase in resistance training. Examples of resistance training include free weights, weight machines, and some variations of the cardiovascular activities. I would also analyze the diet for adequate protein and calories to support muscle growth.

HOW DO I MAKE AND APPOINTMENT TO HAVE A BIA DONE?

You can call the Nutrition Clinic Line for the HIV module which is **(415) 833-2301**. Ask for Andrea Alloway. I can usually set up an appointment within 2 weeks. Your MD can also make a referral at your next check up visit. The co-pay is the same as your doctor's visit co-pay.

Spotlight on: **Sylvia Borgonovo, RN**

Sylvia Borgonovo, RN, is a member of the HIV Specialty Team. She is interviewed by Bonnie Gradstein, HIV Update Editor.



Bonnie: *Tell me about your work at Kaiser Permanente San Francisco?*

Sylvia: I have been a registered nurse for 26 years. I have worked in various capacities at Kaiser Permanente, San Francisco, on and off since 1992. Essentially, I started at Kaiser as a CVICU Nurse then worked in the Research Department doing HIV and Cardiovascular Research. I am currently coordinating the care of HIV patients who are hospitalized at Kaiser San Francisco.

Bonnie: *What is happening at Kaiser SFO in the area of screening for anal cancer?*

Sylvia: I am in the process of developing a program to screen for anal cancer. This is an exciting area, and there is a lot we do not yet know about the development of anal cancer. We do know that it can develop in any HIV+ man or woman, regardless of risk factor. We also know that is related to HPV (human papilloma virus) that causes cervical cancer in women. We know that the risk increases with age. Therefore, I am starting a program to screen for anal cancer in HIV+ men and wom-

en. It will take a few more months to be fully operational. Then, I will be starting screening for the precancerous condition, anal dysplasia. It takes specialized equipment and more time. In addition, since there is a lot we do not know about anal dysplasia and the evolution of cancer, I hope to be involved in some research studies in this area. Kaiser already is involved in research studying HPV and cervical cancer. In addition, since there is disagreement about the benefit of treatment of some of the precancerous conditions in the anus, I hope to be studying that as well.

Bonnie: *How did you get interested in this type of work?*

Sylvia: I became involved with the HIV Research Unit as a Research Nurse in 1996. I have always enjoyed working with patients. I live in San Francisco and enjoy working in this diverse community. When I got involved in this new program, I was drawn to the idea of doing something that could make a difference.

Bonnie: *What do you like best about it; what is most rewarding?*

Sylvia: I like the fact that I will be working in a relatively new field. The service I am developing is desperately needed as there is a rise in anal cancer. I am grateful to be working in an environment that is making a difference in the fight against HIV.

Bonnie: *What are your biggest challenges?*

Sylvia: Introducing something new is always challenging. We have to develop a whole new service requiring new protocols, equipment and training.

Bonnie: *On the personal side... is there anything about yourself that you'd like to share?*

Sylvia: I live in San Francisco with my husband and two children, ages 10 and 15. I love traveling, fishing, running, hiking, baking and making lotions.

WISDOM FROM SYLVIA

My favorite quote:

"Doubts are more cruel than the worst of truths"

by Molière

Get your *HIV Update* Online

EXCITING NEWS... The *HIV Update* is going online

If you prefer to receive the *HIV Update* via e-mail rather than snail mail, contact Bonnie at bonnie.gradstein@kp.org and let her know your e-mail address. You will be added to a confidential e-mail distribution list and receive your next issue online. The *HIV Update* will also be available on kp.org. We will provide more details next issue. Call Bonnie if you have questions. **(415) 833-3452**.

Read... New Feature!

Have you read any good books lately?

If so, please tell us about it so we can share it with the Update Readers.

RECOMMENDED READING:

The Way Out: The Gay Man's Guide to Freedom No Matter if You're in Denial, Closeted, Half In, Half Out, Just Out or Been Around the Block

Submitted by Frank Sclafani, MFT

Book description:

Christopher Lee Nutter came out of the closet in 1994 with a bang in a brutally honest essay for *Details* magazine, thrusting him into the spotlight as an unofficial mentor to gay men across the country.

Twelve years later in this edgy memoir, Nutter chronicles his journey from closeted Southern boy to gay New York bartender and party boy, sharing everything he's learned about how gay men are taught to see themselves in a fundamentally destructive way. Assaulted with

programming from the "gay" and "straight" worlds alike, gay men are left to ask themselves, Am I the coolest, sexiest, trendiest thing ever, or an illegitimate cancer on society?

Nutter contests that gay men are neither, but rather conscious beings on the path to realizing that they have the power to create their lives according to their own will rather than the will of the world, or the illusion of their fears. Part memoir, part philosophy, *The Way Out* gives tools tailored to the reality of gay men's daily existence—whether it's in

the boardroom, the bedroom or the steam room—so that they can connect to this power, and in the process, discover the love, freedom and happiness they long for and deserve.

Written with humor, *The Way Out* is an honest self-help book specifically designed to assist gay men in dealing with the ongoing challenges of life. It provides insights, offers hope, and contains numerous tools to help us live life at our emotional best.

If you would like to recommend a book, please contact Bonnie Gradstein, Editor, at bonnie.gradstein@kp.org or call (415) 833-3452. We'd love you to spread the word about your favorites!

Get to Know your Community...

Annual Conference

Friday – Sunday
August 10 – 12, 2007
UC Berkeley – Clark Kerr Center



AIDS, Medicine
& Miracles

Inspirational Speakers,
Educational/Experiential
Workshops & Lots of
Great Activities!

AM&M is committed to building a supportive sense of community & inspiring people to live healthy, responsible lives filled with hope.

For over 15 years AM&M has provided life-changing, empowering retreat programs for HIV+ people, their loved ones, caregivers, service providers, & anyone impacted by HIV/AIDS

Accommodations & Meals
Provided/Sliding Scale
Registration Fee

www.aidsmedicineandmiracles.org

Get More information and
registration forms to be posted
soon!

Main: 415-252-7111

Fax: 415-252-7117

Toll-Free: 1-800-875-8770

Variety of Volunteers Needed
Especially Website Designers

Thriving in SF — www.thrivinginsf.com

A community of HIV positive people striving to overcome isolation, by providing fellowship, information sharing & a wide variety of fun social activities to enable members to connect with & support one another.

Thriving in SF is an independent community organization, unrelated to Kaisers' THRIVE campaign.

Thrive Socials/1pm Saturdays ■ Thrive Discussions/3rd Saturdays
Market St. at Octavia Blvd. ■ **1pm – 3pm** ■ www.thrivinginsf.com

Weekly FREE YOGA CLASSES & FREQUENT OUTINGS

To get a FULL SCHEDULE of activities, to share lively dialogue and to receive and post HIV related information,

*sign up for Thriving's Yahoo Group**

*Thriving in SF has set up an "unregistered" Yahoo group. HIV positive people are encouraged to join in the dialogue and to discover a range of Thriving events. For privacy, you will need to follow 3 simple steps:

- 1 Sign up for Yahoo (it's FREE!), and in doing so you will set up your own password (for all Yahoo services).
- 2 Then send an email to: thriving-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
- 3 Your request will be automatically sent to the Group's moderator, who will confirm it. You will get an email saying that you're a member.

Or call Rodger Brooks at 863-6974

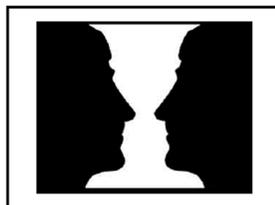
Thriving in SF is an independent community organization, unrelated to Kaiser Permanente's THRIVE campaign.

Participate in a Research Project...



The Focus Project is an intervention using Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to help HIV positive people with the challenges of taking HIV medications. The study is a UCSF research project located at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies. Compensation is provided. Must be at least 18 years old, HIV+, and taking HIV medications. Call **415-597-9350** for more information.

A study for gay men in couple relationships where at least one person is taking HIV medication. Call the **Duo Project** @ **(415) 597-9322** today to take part in an interview and earn cash!!!



Visit an HIV Focused Website

Check out the following:

- www.POZ.com
Website In English & Spanish
- www.projinf.org
- www.thebody.com
- www.treathiv.com

STAYING WELL PROJECT



Are you HIV+ and not on meds? We are seeking participants for a UCSF study on the effects of meditation-based stress management and education groups on physical health and well-being. A study for those not on anti-retroviral (HIV) medications, with CD4 t-cell count above 250 and viral load above 100. Compensation provided. Please call **415-353-9744** for more information.

HIV UPDATE

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The views expressed by the individual writers are not necessarily the views of Kaiser Permanente. We welcome your comments. Letters may be published. Names can be withheld upon request.

Kaiser Permanente San Francisco HIV SERVICES

Appointments & Advice

Dept. of Medicine and HIV Specialty Team

English 833-2200
Spanish 833-2203
Cantonese 833-2239

Benefits, Disability, Financial Assistant

Orlando Jimenez 833-3475

Complaints

833-3725

Chemical Dependency Recovery Program (CDRP)

Vickie Triplett, MFT 292-5030

Dept. of Psychiatry Mental Health Services

833-2292

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Classes & Information 833-3450

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