

HIV-Associated Neurocognitive Disorders (HAND)

Protecting your brain health

Taking HIV medicine is the best way to prevent and treat HAND. Other ways to help protect the health of the brain are listed here:



Look after your mental health and mood

Depression and other mood disorders (such as anxiety) can affect thinking and functioning. These are treatable conditions; talk to your doctor about treatment. If you are already being treated for these conditions but need further support, ask about other options. For many people, counselling is helpful. A form of counselling known as 'cognitive behavioural therapy' is often recommended for treating anxiety and depression. Peer support can also help.



Look after your heart health

Conditions such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol affect your brain health. Looking after your heart health, including taking medicines to manage high blood pressure and cholesterol levels, can benefit your brain. If you are living with diabetes, managing this condition well can also benefit your brain.



Follow a healthy lifestyle

Maintaining a healthy weight, stopping smoking, making sure you stick to moderate alcohol intake (no more than two drinks a day), participating in regular physical exercise, eating nutritious foods, drinking plenty of water and getting a good night's sleep all contribute positively to your brain health, and are especially important if you have been diagnosed with HAND.



Challenge your brain

Keeping your brain active helps your brain to work well. You could try learning a new language, taking up a new sport or hobby, trying a new recipe, doing a course in something you've always wanted to do – anything really, as long as you are learning something new.



Avoid recreational drug use

Use of recreational drugs, particularly methamphetamine and cocaine, has been strongly linked to problems in thinking and mental functioning in people with HIV. If you are finding you have a problem, do not be reluctant to seek help; this is a health issue.



Involve someone else

Your partner, a friend, a family member or a professional home care worker can support you in managing your daily self-care tasks, and help identify any issues early before they become problems.



Build social connections

Be social with people whose company you enjoy and in ways that interest you. Share experiences such as going to the movies or a concert, take off on a trip somewhere, or discover a new café or restaurant.