

# The Connection Between HIV and Mental Health in the Older Adult

How living with HIV can affect your mental health

## Good Mental Health Is Essential to Living Well With HIV

Living with HIV can result in negative feelings or thoughts. In a **national sample** of HIV-positive adults:



Nearly **2 out of 3 people** said that it is difficult to tell people about their HIV status



**1 out of 3 people** reported feeling guilty or ashamed of their HIV status



Nearly **1 in 4 people** said their HIV status makes them feel dirty or worthless



## Mental Health Issues

Aging with HIV not only affects physical health but also can have major mental health effects, including increased rates of:

### Depression and Anxiety

These often go undiagnosed and untreated

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

30% of women living with HIV experience PTSD

### Grief

This can be from losing friends and loved ones to HIV/AIDS and from being rejected by family or friends because of their HIV status

### Discrimination Is a Key Barrier

A recent national study found that, when accessing care, people aging with HIV experienced:

- Stigma **28%**
- Homophobia **19%**
- Ageism **17%**
- Racism **10%**



## Stigma Is a Problem

It's common for older people with HIV to feel stigma, which has a negative effect on a person's quality of life and self-image.

Older adults living with HIV may experience extra stigma because they are labeled by both **age** and **HIV** status.

### Stigma may lead to:

- Avoiding healthcare or support services
- Not taking medicine because of the need for secrecy
- Not disclosing their HIV status
- Living in denial about their HIV status
- Experiencing social isolation and loneliness

## Reach Out to Get the Care and Support You Need



Find a counselor or therapist to help you deal with any negative feelings about your HIV status



Join support groups to connect with other people living with HIV



Start treatment as early as possible and take medicine as prescribed to keep you (and your partner) healthy

