

Pregnancy and contraception

Many people living with HIV choose to have protected sexual intercourse, i.e. they use a condom when they have sex with penetration. This practice is adopted not only to protect others from infection by HIV but for a variety of reasons. Condoms offer protection from other sexually transmitted diseases (STI) and prevent possible re-infection from HIV that may be resistant to the antiretroviral drugs.

For women, an additional and sometimes unwanted outcome of having unprotected sex may be pregnancy. It is important to note that a substantial number of women living with HIV are of childbearing age. While most women who have sex with men will, at some stage, take into consideration issues such as contraception and pregnancy, women living with HIV have more specific needs related to their own health and transmission of the virus.

Many HIV-positive women and their partners are now reconsidering certain decisions made in the past regarding sex, relationships and having children. This change of attitude may have been brought about by the positive impact that high activity antiretroviral therapy (HAART) has had on many people living with HIV, and also due to the availability of effective methods for reducing the rate of mother-to-child transmission of the virus. If you would like to seek advice or counselling on these issues, you may find it beneficial to visit a specialist or to speak to other HIV-positive women who have had similar experiences.

The main Spanish organisations offering support are:

In Andalusia (Seville): ADHARA (Tel.: 954 981 603 / 687 245 264)	Creación positiva (Tel.: 934314548) www.creacionpositiva.net
In the Canary Islands: UNAPRO (Tel.: 922632971) www.unapro.org	In Navarre (Pamplona): SARE (Tel.: 948384149)
In Catalonia (Barcelona): Actúa (Tel.: 934185000) www.actua.org.es	In the Basque Country: Asociación Itxarobide (Tel.: 944449250) www.itxarobide.com

Choosing contraception

Being able to choose the most suitable moment and method is a basic right of women and of people in general. Thinking ahead and taking time to choose the best moment is crucial for the health and well-being of women in general. Seeking information and advice is an important step towards taking care of yourself and your health.

You can find information on the different contraceptive methods in a Family Planning or Sexual Health clinic, in a CAP (Centro de Atención Primaria, a Spanish health care centre), from your HIV specialist or from the Family Planning Federation of Spain (<http://www.fpfe.org>).

If you have had any problems with your method of contraception and you wish to take the post-coital treatment known as "the morning-after pill", you can go to the emergency room of your local hospital or clinic to get a prescription.

Beyond reproductive health

Women who have a CD4 count below 200 cells/mm³ may have either very long or very short menstrual cycles. However, women in early stages of the HIV disease are no more likely to suffer from menstrual disorders than HIV-negative women.

It is important that the contraceptive choices be made on an individual basis, and on the understanding that condoms alone may not be sufficient to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Among the different alternatives, we are aware that:

- There is no evidence to suggest that the coil (intrauterine device, IUD) is any less effective a method of contraception in HIV-positive women, but it may increase the risk of anaemia or pelvic inflammatory disease, which disproportionately affect women with HIV.
- Protease inhibitors (PIs: class of drugs which include Aptivus®, Crixivan®, Invirase®, Kaletra®, Norvir®, Prezista® and Telzir®) reduce blood levels of the oestrogen component in oral contraceptive pills, so women taking both the Pill and PIs may need to use back-up methods of contraception.
- Efavirenz (Sustiva®) and atazanavir (Reyataz®) increase the levels of the oral contraceptive ethinyl estradiol.
- The injectable contraceptive Depo-provera® and the progestogen implant Norplant® may be affected by interaction with PI drugs.

- Other drugs, such as ampicillin (antibiotic), co-trimoxazole (fungicidal) [see *InfoVIHtal* #23: *Cotrimoxazole*] and rifampicin (anti-tuberculosis) may interact with oral contraceptives, so it is important to seek advice on drug interaction from your HIV specialist or pharmacist.

the vagina without intercourse (e.g. via injection with a special syringe). An HIV-negative woman with an HIV-positive male partner may opt for an experimental procedure known as “sperm (or semen) washing” (see *InfoVIHtal* #42: *Sperm washing*), whereby rapid spinning of the semen in a centrifuge allows for the separation of the virus.

Planning the pregnancy

When a couple is thinking about having a child and one partner is HIV-positive, it is possible to use “alternative” methods to prevent transmitting the infection to the HIV-negative partner. An HIV-positive woman with an HIV-negative male partner may choose to conceive using a method of artificial insemination that introduces the semen into

It is highly recommended that you involve your doctor and health care team in your pregnancy plans, particularly if you are taking anti-HIV therapy. Preventing transmission of the virus from mother to child involves the use of anti-retroviral treatment. Planning ahead will help you to ensure that all decisions made regarding your treatment will be the best for you and your child (see *InfoVIHtal* #43: *Mother-to-child transmission*).