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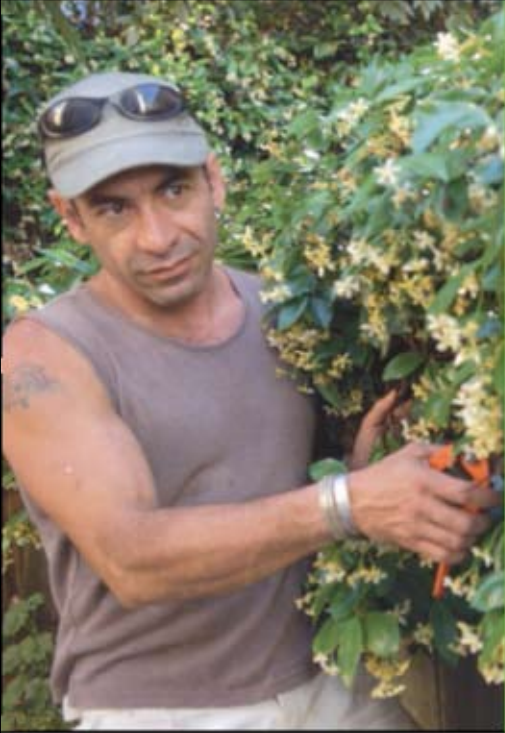
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Managing HIV. It's all about balance.

For more information on balancing health and life,
contact your local PLWHA organisation or AIDS Council.



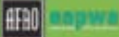


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HIV...Finding the Right Balance

The uptake of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) since 1996 has led to greatly decreased mortality and morbidity among people living with HIV (PLWHA) in Australia. However, there is considerable and increasing evidence that PLWHA who take ARVs face increased risks of cardiovascular disease (heart attack, stroke, hardening arteries, elevated cholesterol and triglycerides, blood pressure), diabetes (blood sugar disorder) and osteopenia (declining bone mineral density). This is in addition to the other previously known side effects of ARVs.

The risks of developing these problems can be reduced significantly by giving up smoking, eating healthier, and increasing exercise or activity, towards healthier living strategies.

Jorge's Story

Having overcome discrimination and isolation after being diagnosed with HIV in his native Columbia, moving to Australia with little English and less money, it isn't surprising that Jorge had the determination to stop smoking by going 'cold-turkey'. Discovering how gardening helps him stay grounded, he decided to set up a landscaping business.

"In 2000 I was in Arq (a nightclub in Sydney) dancing, it was Australia Day, and I was smoking a cigarette at five in the morning and I said 'no more'."

Jorge has overcome a lot to become as healthy and happy as he is today. He was diagnosed with HIV in his native Columbia where 'you can't talk about it, you feel like a criminal, like you've done something wrong to the society and you have to pay for it.'

'There's a lot of taboo, a lot of discrimination about people with HIV; a lot of stigma. They don't talk about HIV, they talk about AIDS. So a person with HIV, is not "HIV positive", all of them are "AIDS people". I was unable to talk to anyone about it.'

Jorge came to Australia confused about what it meant to have HIV. His English was poor and Australian culture was different. Luckily he found a service with a Spanish interpreter.

'I had an Australian partner who was HIV positive and he took me to the hospital and they offered me medication. I met people from the Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service. I had support from them and learned a lot about HIV.'

No longer isolated 'I found other HIV people, we were in working groups, we were chatting together. I had a

carer who was giving me emotional support.'

Jorge has remained involved with the Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service and he now contributes. 'They offered me a course, so I became a worker. Since last April I've been working with the Spanish speaking community.'

Now he is a peer support worker for others with HIV and does community work. He is proud of this, but it isn't easy.

'A lot of people don't know how to use the services. For most of the community there is a lot of taboo about HIV, they don't want to hear about it. We try to reach them but it's hard because it's a very difficult topic to talk about.'

Meanwhile, Jorge was a heavy smoker of Marlboro Reds. 'In 2000 I was in Arq [a nightclub in Sydney] dancing, it was Australia Day, and I was smoking a cigarette at five in the morning and I said "no more".'

Quitting smoking was difficult but Jorge was determined. He reflected on his past, 'I had to pass through very difficult moments to be able to cope with the society, with the culture, with the language, so I said to myself, if I can cope with all this and I want to be here and I want to improve my lifestyle, I have to make changes.'

He hasn't smoked since. For Jorge, smoking and socialising had always gone hand-in-hand, but he still wanted to socialise, so he worked hard at finding a balance so that his social life didn't suffer. 'I stopped at 5 in the morning and that night I went out and I had beers and, you know, when you drink you want to smoke. But I didn't.'

Dr Caroline Warne is a Sydney HIV specialist GP who has focused on working with people to support changes towards healthier lifestyles, and disease prevention. She has noticed a change among people with HIV when it comes to talking about smoking. 'People will often come and say "look this is always the way I've been, I've always smoked heavily when I've gone out to dance clubs and parties and when I've used

alcohol or other recreational drugs, but I no longer feel that it's okay. This is becoming an increasingly anti-social activity and I'm feeling peer pressure". Peer pressure is encouraging some people to quit now.

'There can be lots of things that will trigger people to smoke. Going to bars. Using recreational drugs. Having friends that smoke. But I like to think that this is changing, that the culture is changing.'

When asked about how he found the strength to make this life change, Jorge talks like others who've made similar shifts. He describes learning to accept things about himself, facing personal issues, learning better ways to cope with his problems, worries and anxiety.

'I was upset all the time. The way I was sometimes treating my friends was not good. I realised I had to make changes to live better. I was very upset with society, a lot of things happened to me. I learned to let it go and to heal and to get better.'

He used meditation and personal growth tapes and found the answers within himself. 'I've been making lots of changes to be more understanding with people. I try to not gossip about people's lives or behaviours. I try to respect everybody's behaviour. To improve life every day, and try to be more honest.'

Exercise is important. He visits the gym early mornings, runs on the beach and works as a landscape gardener. He eats lots of fresh fruit and salads and avoids 'bad' fats and oils. Jorge believes in the wisdom of 'healthy body, healthy mind'.

When asked about his most precious times, Jorge speaks of his love for gardens and what happens when he is in them. 'For me, a garden is a place for contemplation, meditation, to be calm. When I get in touch with the garden I forget about the rest of life, about things happening around me.'

Jorge is in great health and other parts of his life are also going well. 'I feel so proud of myself. I came

to a new culture with no money, no family, and over six years I have learned a lot. I have my landscape gardening diploma, I'm working for the government, I've got my car, I run my business. I think I am doing very well. I'm going to do much better.'

Some people see HIV as having been an important catalyst to make changes in their lives. For Jorge this experience was life-changing. 'Here I've learned to live with HIV, I've learned to have a better future for me and I learned to be happy. I realise HIV is a great thing that happened to me because I've learned to improve my lifestyle, to be happy and be able to move on.'

Managing HIV... It's about balance.

Source: July 2008 Edition of Positive Living Magazines (NAPWA). AFAO *HIV Balance* national campaign.

See:
<http://www.napwa.org.au/hivbalance>