



**hiV**  
Children and  
Young People  
HIV Network

# STUDENT

# LIFE GOING TO UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE:

A GUIDE FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV IN THEIR TEENS AND EARLY ADULthood



[NCB.org.uk/LifeLinks](http://NCB.org.uk/LifeLinks)



So you're thinking of going to university or college and you have HIV? Great. Lots of young people with HIV have done this.

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This leaflet is a starting point to answering these questions, and will direct you to support and further information. Download other leaflets on life for young adults with HIV from [NCB.org.uk/LifeLinks](https://www.ncb.org.uk/LifeLinks) or get them from clinics or support services.

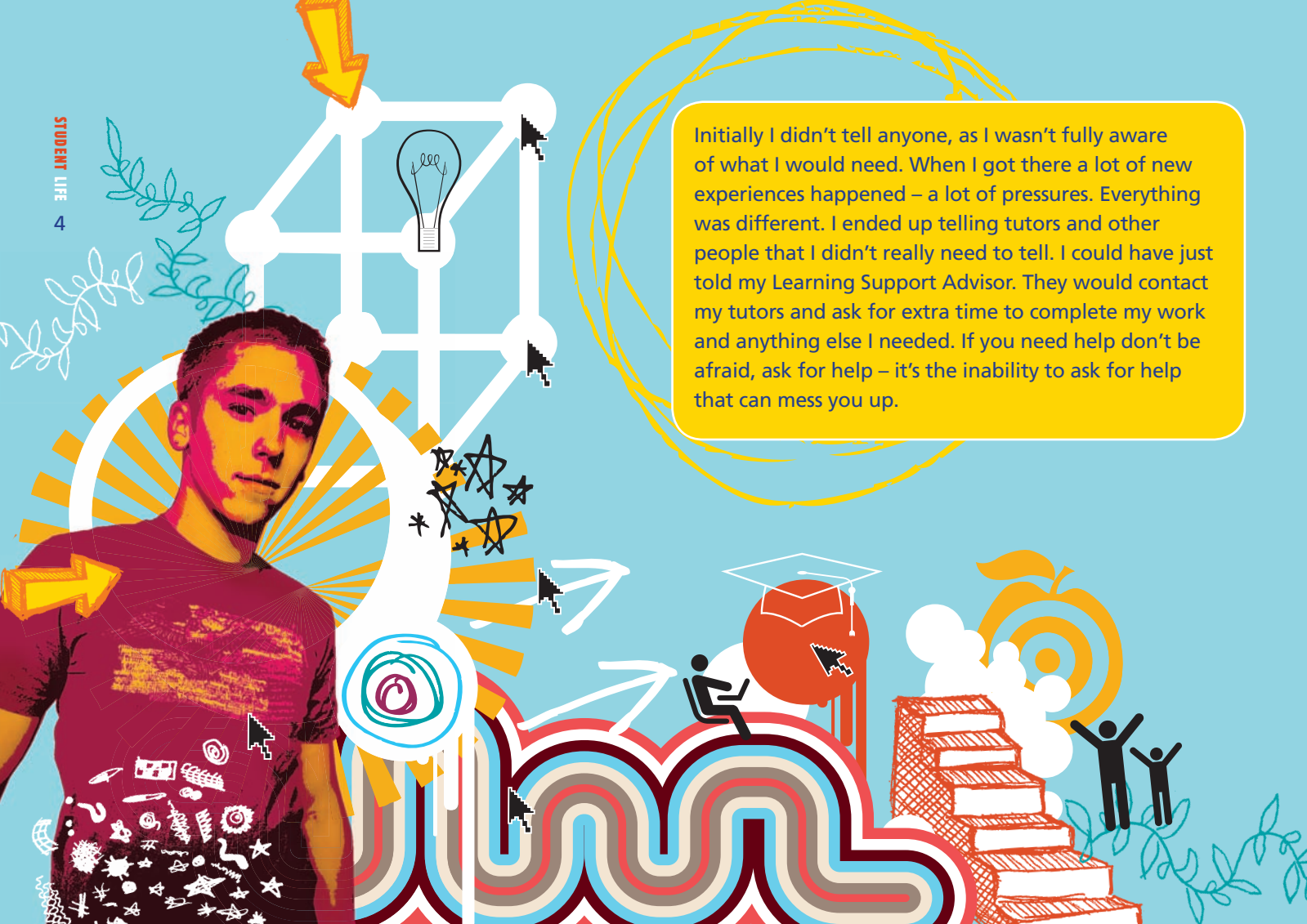
Want to hear from a young person with HIV who is at uni? Look out for the yellow boxes.

# DO I TELL MY UNI OR COLLEGE I HAVE HIV?

You don't **have** to tell them. But you might **choose** to. Why tell?

- It might be good to know there is someone there you can talk to if you need to. You could decide to just tell a Student Support Officer or a college counsellor. If you have particular needs relating to your accommodation, universities can help.
- You may be unwell at some point and this might affect your studies. Someone at uni or college who knows that you have HIV may be able to help you get extra support, time out from your studies, or extensions on your deadlines.
- Before you decide to tell your uni or college, you might like to discuss this with your clinic team, a support worker if you have one, and your family.





Initially I didn't tell anyone, as I wasn't fully aware of what I would need. When I got there a lot of new experiences happened – a lot of pressures. Everything was different. I ended up telling tutors and other people that I didn't really need to tell. I could have just told my Learning Support Advisor. They would contact my tutors and ask for extra time to complete my work and anything else I needed. If you need help don't be afraid, ask for help – it's the inability to ask for help that can mess you up.

## WHAT MIGHT I NEED TO THINK ABOUT IF I DO DECIDE TO TELL?

- You can ask staff at your uni or college to keep the information that you have HIV confidential.
- Your HIV status is your personal health information. Your permission is needed for anyone to share this with anyone else.
- You can ask for a confidentiality agreement that you can both sign. This can state that the information about your HIV will not be shared with anyone else without your permission.
- At [NCB.org.uk/LifeLinks](https://www.ncb.org.uk/LifeLinks), you can find guidance for universities and colleges on students and HIV. This can help them respond to you sensitively and supportively, and to learn more about HIV. You can also download an example of a confidentiality agreement, made by CHIVA.

- In addition, you could ask a support worker, peer mentor or member of your clinic team to talk to your university or college.

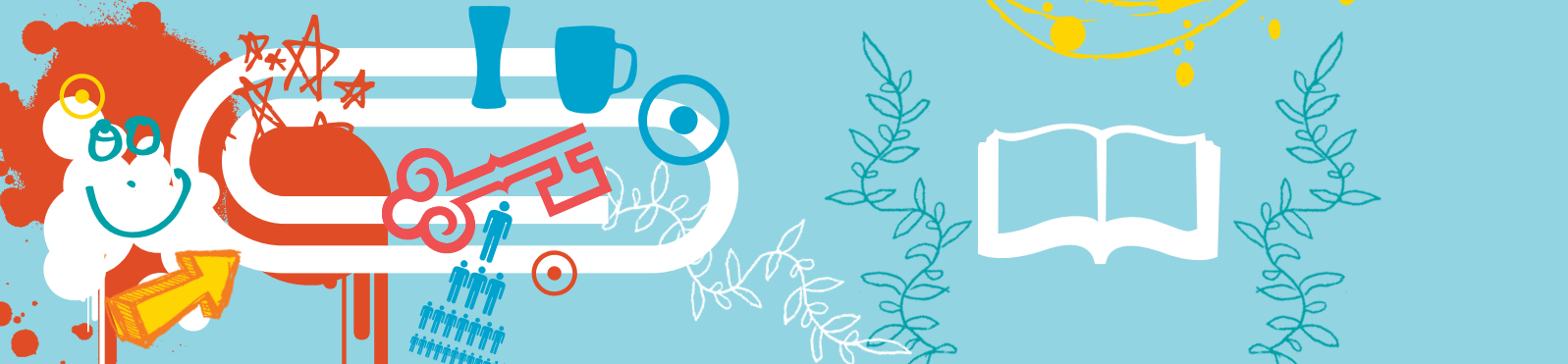
The Learning Support teams asked me for my permission to share 'some' of the details I gave them with other members of staff. They don't have to share your HIV status, just that you have a health condition.

## WHAT WILL IT FEEL LIKE LIVING AWAY FROM HOME?

- You might be living away from home for the first time, perhaps sharing a flat with friends or living in university accommodation.
- It can be a time of your life that is exciting and full of changes – your first experience of feeling like an adult.
- It might also feel a bit daunting. You might be worried about being on your own for the first time, or having to remember to take your medication. Perhaps you feel anxious that people may find out about your HIV and might not always react well to this.

- You don't **have** to tell anyone you have HIV. But you might **choose** to tell a friend or partner.
- You might decide to study near home so you don't have to move. You will probably still find that your life opens up to a lot more people when you become a student.

It's up to you who you tell. I told people I was close to and I felt I could trust. But you don't have to. It can help if you're stressed, if there is someone you can talk to and who knows you. It can make you feel more comfortable.



## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP THIS FEEL A BIT EASIER?

- Talking about things that are worrying you is always a good idea. Is there someone you can talk to openly? This might be a friend from home you already trust, a support worker or your nurse or doctor. You can contact other young people with HIV aged 24 and under on the secure website set up by **CHIVA.org.uk**. People aged over 16 can also use the forum at **MyHIV.org.uk**.
- If you decide there is someone you want to tell that you have HIV, think this through carefully. Try to prepare yourself for different kinds of reactions.
- Have you seen the **Sharing in Life** leaflet? It's all about telling friends, housemates and partners about HIV. The websites on page 15 also have lots of tips and other young people's stories.

Be aware that you're not the first and you won't be the last. Other people experience all kinds of difficulties at uni.

Try to limit stress as much as possible as it's important for us. Be aware that certain medication can make you vulnerable to things like depression. It can come on because of the different pressures and stress you are facing. Take stock of how you are mentally and physically. If you do get depressed, you should tell your doctor. It might be an effect of your medication and they might be able to change it.





## DO I HAVE TO CHANGE MY HOSPITAL IF I MOVE TO A DIFFERENT AREA?

- Many young people choose to keep going to the same hospital where they already get their HIV care. They go during holiday times when they are back home.
- It can be helpful for someone from a local health service to know about you. You can go and see them if you need to while you're away from home. You might run out of medication or need treatment for another illness.
- This local health service could be a GP, or it could be the clinic at a hospital nearer your university or college (e.g. a sexual health or Infectious Diseases clinic). The doctors here will make contact with your main HIV doctor, and they can work together to care for you while you are away from home.
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about how you can plan for your health care when you move away from home.

Make sure you register with a local GP. You can go back to your old GP when you go home. It's good to have links with a local GP to make sure you have health support in place near you.





## HOW CAN I REMEMBER TO TAKE MY MEDS?

You might find your lifestyle changes a lot when you move away and go to uni or college.

Late nights, late mornings, going out more, spending more time with friends ... All sounds great!

But how are you going to remember to take your meds? Here are some tips.

- Get organised! Plan your week ahead putting all your meds for the week into a weekly pillbox (your nurse or doctor can give you one).
- You can put your daily meds into a small pillbox that can go in your pocket or bag for the day.
- Try **iDiary Meds**, a discreet phone app designed by young people with HIV to help remember medication.

- Record your doses in a paper, computer or phone calendar or diary – use a symbol to represent this if you don't want to write it down.
- Be careful about drink and drugs. If you vomit within an hour of taking your meds, you need to take them again. Also, some drugs may interact with your HIV meds.

If it's really difficult to manage the times talk to your doctor – he or she may be able to switch your doses to be taken at an easier time of day.



## WHAT EXTRA SUPPORT MIGHT I GET WHILE I STUDY?

All universities have student support services.

- Your contact with them is confidential unless you want them to talk to your tutors on your behalf.
- They can help you access counselling if you need to talk to someone about how you're feeling or coping at uni.
- Nightline is a confidential listening, emotional support and guidance service run by students for students at many universities, during the night. See [Nightline.ac.uk](http://Nightline.ac.uk).

Colleges will also have a student welfare service and many will have counsellors.

You can also call **THT Direct** on 0808 802 1221 or visit [MyHIV.org.uk](http://MyHIV.org.uk). THT advisers provide advice and emotional support to people with HIV.

There may also be an HIV support organisation near your university or college. Look for services at [LifewithHIV.org.uk](http://LifewithHIV.org.uk).



## WHAT ABOUT FINANCES?

- All universities charge tuition fees. They range from £4,500 to £9,000 per year.
- You **do not** have to pay your tuition fees up front. You only start paying them back when you're working and your salary reaches a certain level.
- You will also have some living costs if you move away from home, like rent, food and bills. You'll probably also need to buy books for your course.
- You can get a series of loans to help pay tuition fees and also maintenance loans to help you with the daily living costs.
- Visit **GOV.UK** and search for 'student finance'.

Many students work in part-time jobs to fund their time studying. You'll be able to get advice about this through your university or college. Just make sure you don't take on too much pressure.

## WHAT EXTRA HELP CAN I GET WITH FINANCES?

If you're at uni:

- Talk to your student support service. Most universities have hardship grants.
- Look up 'National Scholarship Programme' at **GOV.UK** to find out which universities offer scholarships (reduced fees) to students.

If you're at college, ask your college about:

- A bursary if you're aged 16 – 19. This is a lump sum to help you meet costs involved in studying, like books and transport. Ask at your college about this.
- Discretionary Learner Support if you're 19 or over and facing financial hardship.

Disabled students may get extra support at college and uni. You might not consider yourself disabled because you have HIV, but HIV is considered a disability in the law.

There will be a Disability Adviser at uni.

You might be able to get Disabled Students' Allowance (DSAs) if your health affects your ability to study. You have to apply and a decision will be made. Get some help with this form if you need it. Find out more at [DisabilityRightsUK.org](http://DisabilityRightsUK.org).

## DO I NEED TO TELL **SEXUAL PARTNERS** I HAVE HIV?

There is not a simple **yes** or **no** answer to this. The very important thing is **yes** to using condoms.

Things to consider ...

- Being open about your HIV status can help you feel completely accepted.
- You can both trust each other more if you're open.

- They may not be understanding and may reject you – you need to be ready for this just in case.
- Once you've given them that information, you can't get it back and there is a risk they may tell someone else.
- Whether you're in a relationship with this person, or expect to be for some time.

Try to talk this through with someone you trust first, and make sure you know about HIV and sexual health. If you decide to tell, plan this carefully. Websites at the back of this leaflet can help with this.

The biggest issue is probably sexual partners. A lot of people have more sexual partners when they get to uni. If you're protected – using a condom – do what you're doing and have a good time! This applies to everyone – everyone needs to protect themselves in sex. It's just that if you don't use a condom and you have HIV you put yourself at risk of transmitting HIV.

## DOES HIV AFFECT WHAT I CAN STUDY?

There are thousands of careers available to you, and only a tiny number that are currently not open to people with HIV. At the time of writing, the armed forces don't accept applicants with HIV.

Students training for hands-on healthcare jobs are not **required** to disclose HIV unless their role will involve close exposure to the insides of people's bodies.

People with HIV are restricted from performing those activities, but they **can** be doctors and nurses. Only a small number of jobs – and therefore courses – are off limits altogether. These include dentistry, surgical training, and sometimes midwifery. The rules may change and you should get advice. Be aware though that healthcare workers with HIV are **expected** to disclose so that any health risks can be considered.

## DOES HIV AFFECT WHERE I CAN STUDY?

If you wish to study abroad at all, do a little research – start at [namlife.org](http://namlife.org) and ask your nurse or support worker to help. For example, find out:

- whether your chosen country has any travel restrictions on people with HIV
- whether and how you could get the insurance and medical treatment you'd need.

It's sensible to think about the support networks and services you might need to feel happy abroad. You may also need to find out what the local law says about disclosing HIV to sexual partners.

When picking your university, our status is a factor in our choice. Look at the services around you and look at the distance from your existing support systems. Be aware when you make your choices, if it's not cool, what's there? What can help? Make sure you make informed choices.

I didn't really think about my HIV status when I picked my university. I should have. It's about finding a place that's suitable for you. When I transferred to a different university, I did all of that and I'm considerably happier now.

Looking at league tables isn't enough – look at good student guides. They give a truer presentation of what the university is actually like.

Loads of students at your uni or college will also be managing health conditions, many of which, like HIV, are not visible to others. Visit [Youthhealthtalk.org](http://Youthhealthtalk.org) to hear how some of them deal with student life.

## WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

**THT Direct** – call 0808 802 1221 (free from landlines and most mobiles, check [MyHIV.org.uk](http://MyHIV.org.uk) for opening times) for help relating to HIV or visit [MyHIV.org.uk](http://MyHIV.org.uk).

**Nightline.ac.uk** – if you need help during the night, your uni may have a Nightline service

**HIV information, advice and networking for young people**

**CHIVA.org.uk** (Children's HIV Association) – includes secure site for young people with HIV aged 24 and under, with social networking

**Pozitude.co.uk** – includes forum and Your Stories

**Bodyandsoulcharity.org** – includes young people's radio podcasts and comic book and audio stories

**Information for young people on university and college**

**GOV.UK** Education and Learning section – information on student finance, a tool for choosing a university, and loads more

**Push.co.uk** – covers all aspects of student life

**DisabilityRightsUK.org** – information and support for disabled students

**Gaybydegree.org.uk** – for lesbian, gay and bisexual prospective students





## LIFELINKS

LifeLinks is a web directory to help you find information and support on all aspects of becoming an adult, as well as HIV. It contains other leaflets like this, links and helpline numbers as well as step-by-step advice for certain situations.

Visit [NCB.org.uk/LifeLinks](http://NCB.org.uk/LifeLinks) or scan this QR code with a phone app and it will take you straight there... Remember to save the link!

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