

Part Two
Common problems in people aging with HIV

Chapter 5
Memory problem

Section I. Memory problem and its importance

5-1. Why do some people aging with HIV have memory problems?

Age puts you at risk of memory problems from many causes. The most common cause in the US is Alzheimer's disease. In Alzheimer's, brain cells break down, causing lower brain function. People aging with HIV may have memory problems from Alzheimer's, just like everybody else. But, HIV itself can also hurt brain cells. This makes brain problems more likely compared to people without HIV.

5-2. What happens when HIV hurts the brain?

HIV can cause many problems, hurting your work, social and family life.

- a. *Problems with brain function:* HIV can cause memory problems, lower reading and math skills, lower attention, and problems dealing with information.
- b. *Problems with mood:* HIV can also cause anxiety and lack of interest.
- c. *Problems with movement:* HIV can also cause shaking of hands, making it hard to eat soup or to get dressed. It also causes poor leg movements leading to falls.

Section II. Memory problem: what to do with your doctor

5-3. Talk to your doctor about HIV pills

For many people, HIV pills can ease brain problems and stop them from getting worse. If you are not already taking HIV pills, ask your doctor if you can start.

5-4. Ask if you should also see other health care workers

Other health care workers can give extra help with brain problems in HIV. If you have memory problems, ask if you should see a geriatrician. If you have mood problems, ask if you should see a psychiatrist. If you have problems with movement, ask if you should see a physical or occupational therapist. If you have problems with work or family life, ask if you should see a social worker.

Section III. Memory problem: what to do on your own

5-5. Take pills correctly

Take the right amount of pills at the right time of day. If this is difficult, use a pillbox or ask someone to remind you. This is really important for your HIV pills. The lower your HIV, the less likely you will have brain problems.

5-6. Plan for the future

Brain problems can cause trouble with health and money down the line. Plan ahead. Pick someone you trust to make decisions about money and health. This person is a backup in case you cannot make decisions on your own. Then, plan with that person. Tell them in advance how you want money and health handled. If you do not know how to plan for your health, ask your doctor for help. Write your plans clearly in a will, and give copies to your lawyer and family members. Keep your copy somewhere you can easily get to, in case you need it in an emergency.