We are on the outside, but some of us were inside before and survived it. We’re here to take your health questions seriously and make complicated health information understandable. We want to help you learn how to get better health care within your facility and how to get answers to your health questions. Be persistent—don’t give up. Join us in our fight for the right to health care and health information.

Read on...

From

Elisabeth, Lucy, Suzy, and Teresa

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Would you like to see your art, writing or poetry in Prison Health News?

If you want to write an article on something you think is important for prison health, send it and we will consider publishing it in Prison Health News. Tell us your story of struggling to receive quality health care, either for yourself or others. Do you have tips and tricks for staying healthy and taking care of yourself behind the walls that could be useful to others in the same position? You can also write us first to discuss ideas for articles. If you want your full name kept confidential, you can sign your article with your first name or “Anonymous.”

Please keep in mind that we may make small changes to your article for length or clarity. For any major changes to your work, we will try to get in touch with you first. Only for submitting your work, write to us at this address:

PHN Submissions
C/o Institute for Community Justice
1207 Chestnut St, 2nd Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107

For all other inquiries write to the Locust Street address on page 16.

First, what is anger? Anger is an emotion, a strong feeling that Webster’s Dictionary defines as “a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism.”

Second, why worry about anger? Because if it is not dealt with, anger can turn into rage, like a teapot or a volcano effect. It can also lead to severe health problems such as (but not limited to) heart problems, high blood pressure, and stroke.

Tip # 1: I do not have to be right. It’s OK to be wrong.

The time is now to start an anger management program. Here is a list of some programs that can help:

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Narcotics Anonymous
- Spiritual or religious practice
- Recreation
- A hobby
- Writing in a journal or diary regularly

Tip #2: Don’t sweat the small stuff.

For me, it works best to remember this: I > E, which means Intellect is greater than Emotion. In other words, Think, Think, Think. However, many people find that once you understand your emotions and where they’re coming from, they can work together with your intellect to help you figure out how to respond to a situation.

Making amends when possible can help. The Big Book of AA says resentment is the #1 offender leading people to relapse to problem drinking. Resentment is caused by blaming others instead of focusing on what you can do to make things better.
I try to always use “I” statements. Here are some examples of “I” statements:

- “I would like your help.”
- “I would like a moment of your time.”
- “I would like to work this out in a peaceful manner.”
- “I hope we can agree to disagree.”
- “I value your friendship, so I need a Time Out.”

When I’m really angry, I take the following steps:

1. I must take a Time Out and get away. Exploding will not meet my needs over time.
2. Talk it out. Be honest and respectful.
3. Work it out! I channel the energy of my anger into activities I care about. Some options are being creative, writing it down, or doing something constructive. Physical exercise can help you release all those endorphins.

I recommend practicing stress reduction techniques. They work best if you keep practicing them every day or week. Here are some ideas:

- Deep, slow breathing
- Music
- Reading
- Writing
- Prayer or meditation
- A hobby
- A funny TV show or movie
- Talking to a friend, mentor or sponsor
- Exercise

**Tip #3: Practice humility.**

I practice humility by walking away from a fight. Because I might be right, but a fight would be wrong. I once heard that it takes two fools to argue and it takes two imbeciles to fight. I also practice humility when a guard gets in my face, by not escalating the situation.

When someone is rude or disrespectful, I do not correct them. I learned a long time ago that I am not the manners police.

If I’m wrong, I correct it as soon as possible.

Good luck with anger management! I hope this may help you.
Finding out that you have both HIV and hepatitis C can be difficult. Some people can be living with HIV and/or hepatitis C and not know their status because it sometimes takes a long time for symptoms to appear. If you think you might have contracted HIV or hepatitis C, you can ask your doctor to provide testing. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services guidelines, prisons should provide testing.

**What is HIV/hepatitis C co-infection?**

Co-infection means that a person is living with more than one virus. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one-third of people living with HIV in the United States have either hepatitis B virus or hepatitis C virus. This is because hepatitis B and C and HIV have some overlap in their modes of transmission. For those living with HIV who also inject drugs, the rate of having both HIV and hepatitis C is higher.

**How does co-infection happen?**

Both HIV and hepatitis C can be transmitted through blood. In both cases, a virus lives in the blood, and that virus can be transferred from one person to another. While HIV cannot survive for very long outside of the body, the hepatitis C virus can live outside the body for up to three weeks. The hepatitis C virus can survive in dried blood, even if it is in tattoo ink or on a needle or other injection equipment. People who are incarcerated are at greater risk for hepatitis C, because many people in jail or prison already have it. The most common ways that people get hepatitis C in prison are through injecting drugs, tattooing, or piercing. To prevent hepatitis C transmission, try to avoid sharing needles, cookers, cottons, ties, water used for drugs or ink, needles, or barrels that have been used by anyone else. If there is blood on any of these objects, it is usually too small to see. Bleaching, boiling, heating with a flame, using cleaning supplies, alcohol, or peroxide are not strong enough to kill the hepatitis C virus.

HIV is transmitted only through certain body fluids, including blood, semen (cum), pre-cum, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. The most common forms of transmission are through anal or vaginal sex and by sharing needles or syringes. In order to have a co-infection, you must have contracted both HIV and hepatitis C.

**How does the combination of HIV and Hepatitis C impact someone’s health?**

People living with both HIV and hepatitis C are at greater risk for developing serious medical conditions, including an increased risk for developing chronic hepatitis. This is because those who are living with HIV and hepatitis C are more likely to have the virus progress at a faster rate. This is likely to cause liver-related health problems. Living with HIV and hepatitis C may also complicate the treatment of HIV. It is recommended that those living with HIV should get tested for hepatitis B and C. HIV and hepatitis C can be effectively treated in most people.

**Considerations for Starting Treatment**

**How should I start to prepare for hepatitis C treatment?**

Starting treatment for both hepatitis C and HIV can be a big step. In order for the drugs to work, it is important to take them on the schedule your doctor
prescribes. Hepatitis C can be cured. The body is more likely to clear hepatitis C if you take all of the doses. There is currently no cure for HIV, but it can be effectively treated. By taking HIV medications as prescribed, the virus will stay suppressed. Missing doses gives HIV the opportunity to strengthen and take more control in the body.

**What does this mean for my HIV treatment?**

It is not recommended to stop HIV treatment when you start treatment for hepatitis C. Antiretroviral therapy can even slow the progression of liver disease, because it helps restore immune functioning.

**What about drug interference?**

It might be helpful to ask to your doctor to find out if any of the HIV meds you take negatively impact the progression of hepatitis C liver disease. Hepatitis C treatment regimens should be selected with special consideration for how different medications interact with each other.

**What type of test needs to be done before treatment?**

According to the National Institutes of Health, all individuals living with HIV and hepatitis C should be evaluated for hepatitis C treatment. If you have both HIV and hepatitis C, you can ask your doctor for a liver fibrosis stage assessment, because it informs treatment. People living with HIV and hepatitis C should also be screened for the hepatitis B virus.

**What about side effects?**

Hepatitis C treatment with the new direct-acting antivirals has very few side effects. When side effects are reported, they are generally mild and rarely involve stopping treatment. Those living with HIV might experience symptoms at a slightly greater intensity. This includes fatigue, headache, nausea, diarrhea, insomnia, and weakness.

**What else impacts treatment?**

The rate at which hepatitis C affects the body is impacted by age, alcohol consumption, and amount of time since transmission. The progression of hepatitis C will impact your ability to obtain treatment within prison or jail. Even though it is recommended that all people receive treatment for hepatitis C, your ability to obtain treatment is impacted by how far along hepatitis C has progressed. It is the standard of care that everyone who has chronic hepatitis C must get treatment. It is unfair and unconstitutional that many prisons only reserve treatment for those whose hepatitis C has progressed far.

**Is there special consideration given to those living with both HIV and hepatitis C?**

There is no evidence that people living with both HIV and hepatitis C are more likely to get treatment in prison than those with one virus.

**How else can I take care of my health?**

There are some things that you can do to protect your liver health. These include getting enough rest, exercising, eating healthy foods, and avoiding alcohol and smoking. It is also important to take care of your mental health. Different people find different things helpful, but some people take care of their mental health by talking to someone they trust, getting exercise, writing in a journal, doing art, and/or talking to a counselor.
As many as four out of every ten people incarcerated in state prisons are living with hepatitis C, the US Department of Health and Human Services reports. But fewer than one out of every hundred people in prison living with chronic hepatitis C are getting treatment, according to Mandy Altman of the Hepatitis Education Project. Prisons are refusing to provide treatment even though there is now a cure. Drug companies have been allowed to set extremely high prices, because we live under a free-market economic system, and states lack the money to pay.

“The direct-acting antiviral drugs that cure hepatitis C make elimination feasible in the United States,” according to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM). The government founded NASEM to provide expert advice so Congress and the President can make better decisions. NASEM is putting together a National Strategy for the Elimination of Hepatitis B and C, but it’s unclear whether the government will take its advice.

A win-win ignored

“Unrestricted hepatitis C treatment could reduce new cases of hepatitis C by 90% by 2030,” NASEM reports. In order to keep hepatitis C from spreading, prisons must offer testing to everyone and provide treatment to anyone who has chronic hepatitis C, the report states. NASEM recommends that the federal government get a license from a drug company to provide treatment to neglected populations. The federal government would pay about $2 billion for the licensing rights to a patented drug. States would then pay about $140 million to provide treatment to 700,000 people in prison or on Medicaid. Without the license, it would cost about $10 billion to treat only 240,000 patients.

Under the license, the drug company would be paid, and the cure would only be given to people who are not already buying the drug—so the company would not be losing any high-priced business. The company’s profits under the license “would exceed what the company could expect without the license,” Altman says.

But drug companies refuse to hear it. “Based on my colleagues’ conversations with pharma companies, they are not open to negotiating any such licensing agreement,” says Elizabeth Paukstis, Public Policy Director of the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable.

And Altman doesn't know of any action being taken to implement NASEM’s strategy. “I think it's unlikely that the federal government—especially under this [Trump] administration—will pursue a licensing agreement with a drug company to treat people living with hepatitis C in prison,” Paukstis says. “It's up to us advocates to figure out how to make it happen.”
Building political will
Three things are needed to put pressure on the government and drug companies: increased competition in the market, advocacy, and grievances and litigation filed by people in prison. Competition in the hepatitis C drug market is already increasing, with several companies offering slightly less expensive new drugs, but it’s not enough. Advocacy will have to step up to the plate.

“We need to start by educating policymakers and raising awareness about the egregious lack of hepatitis C treatment provided in prisons,” Paukstis says. She explains that anyone who cares about this issue needs to tell elected officials that hepatitis C is a public health crisis that is increasing because of the opioid epidemic, providing treatment in prisons is necessary to stop the disease spreading, treatment in prison is a moral and constitutional obligation, and pharmaceutical companies must provide deeper discounts.

States might be more likely to successfully negotiate lower prices than the federal government. Officials in Louisiana and New York are talking about increasing their commitment to fight hepatitis C. This commitment needs to include treatment for people in prison.

“I have spoken to medical directors of state correctional departments who have said their DOCs would be open to lifting restrictions to hepatitis C treatment if they could get lower prices from the drug companies,” Paukstis says.

“Unfortunately, drug companies have shown no willingness to negotiate as of yet. But if more pressure to do so mounts, and more influential and public figures apply that pressure, maybe the companies will start to budge.” If the public demands it, laws could be changed so states have more power to negotiate discounts.

In the meantime...
If you have made a written request for hepatitis C treatment and received a denial of the request on paper, you can file a grievance. Try to prove that the decision was based on the high cost. Your grievance can say, “Because there’s no medical reason for refusing the care, I request that this be remedied. Failure to do so would be deliberate indifference to a serious medical need.”

The prison may respond by saying you are being treated already because medical staff are monitoring your condition with blood tests. This is still deliberate indifference. Providing treatment known to be less effective still exposes you to unacceptable risk of injury. Try to establish that the prison was aware of the risks to your health and didn’t take reasonable measures to prevent them.
I have been fighting long and hard to get gender reassignment surgery here in California. There are now protocols in place for inmates in the California Department of Corrections to apply for surgery. I applied with the medical department for reassignment surgery, but I kept my civil action (lawsuit) open. I have not lost a major motion to date, so the outlook (at least for now) looks pretty good for negotiation.

My civil action is about more than just surgery. After years of grievances/appeals and civil actions by several of us throughout the state, including Ms. Michelle Norseworthy and Ms. Shiloh Quine, we have achieved the victory of a “new” personal and state property matrix for transgender inmates. Even this was fought by the state as if their lives depended on it.

There were some things that were not included in the property matrix, as I expected there wouldn’t be, but overall it is a big victory—just one of many to come.

The matrix now allows transgender inmates to order some clothing and cosmetics congruent with their gender identity. We are allowed to order these from approved vendor catalogs. These catalogs offer sneakers, shower slippers, women’s slippers, underwear, sweats and other items. These items can only be purchased by friends or family members or if the inmate has a prepaid vendor account or enough money on their inmate account to purchase these items themselves. Many inmates don’t have any of these. Also, many trans women here do not have pay numbers that would allow them to purchase even the most basic of cosmetic items from the prison canteen. Many women have no outside support, which prevents them very often from being able to acquire what is needed to properly present in their female identities. This is an unfortunate circumstance.

The property matrix also allows for all transgender inmates to request that the prison laundry exchange their state-issued clothing for clothing appropriate to their gender. I believe that will actually be more complicated, because in the case of men’s facilities, that will require laundry managers to order the clothing. This will give the prisons reason to stall or deny based on using the prison budget as an excuse, saying the prison doesn’t have the money.

I sent a request to our laundry manager requesting all of the clothing items allowed at women’s facilities. I am, however, operating on the belief that the facility is in no hurry to accommodate the LGBTQ community and are using things like order delays and lack of budget to defy the courts. As usual, we are experiencing quite a bit of pushback from the staff who do not agree with our lifestyle, in an effort to discourage us from being and presenting as who we are.
Female pajamas, bathrobes, hair clips and hair brushes are needed but are not included in the matrix. It also excludes earrings and bracelets, as well as scarves, due to supposed safety and security concerns. I live in an open dorm situation, and a bathrobe is important for the purpose of modesty, particularly going to and from the shower. I have dreadlocks, but for the trans women who do not and are in need of a hair brush, the denial of this is a hindrance to daily grooming.

The Department has determined that only inmates who have a form stating they are transgender can order any of the allowed items from the approved vendor catalogs. But many people are simply gender non-conforming and may want to, from time to time, wear a little makeup or even want to be modest and wear a robe to the shower or restroom in the night when it is necessary.

In any case, we in California have achieved a couple major victories when it comes to gender identity. But it is imperative that the fight continues, not just here in California but across the nation. I encourage all of you to use what has happened here in California as your template, do your homework and always make sure you cover all your bases. Use every little thing you can think of—you would be surprised what can be important.

Until next time, friends and family, never stop fighting.

Love and solidarity,
Fatima Malika Shabazz

Artwork by Dave Loewenstein
Preparing your own meals from items you purchase from commissary [if you have money on your books] allows you to control what you’re putting into your meals and pay attention to the contents. Just as our bodies must consume a particular number of calories, they must also consume vitamins. Unfortunately, in most cases, kitchens overcook the vegetables, and it’s extracting the vitamins we need. To make up for this, you can eat fruit. Regardless of what you eat, it’s good to drink water throughout the day in order for the body to function properly. Drinking water will help you digest food properly.

—Russell Auguillard

**Fruit Salad:**
Collect different types of fruit throughout the three meals served. You can save bananas, apples, oranges, grapefruit and pears [although this may involve some risk]. Some places serve canned fruit for dessert. You can mix the fruit salad with a tropical blend of nuts and drizzle with a little bit of honey.

**Workout Shake:**
2 oatmeal packs
2 teaspoons peanut butter
1 or 2 chopped-up bananas
hot water
1 empty container
*optional: commissary protein or breakfast shake

Instructions
First add oatmeal and peanut butter, and if you want, one-fourth of a packet of protein shake. Shake very well. Then add bananas and hot water. Continue to shake, and make sure nothing sticks to the bottom.

—Eli Cathell

Spread Your Protein Throughout the Day. Most people can absorb only about 25 to 35 grams of protein at a time for muscle building and repair. The rest will turn to fat. As a guide, 30 grams is equivalent to five eggs, four ounces of chicken, or 20 ounces of low-fat yogurt.

—Tomas Ramirez
When you choose potatoes from commissary, you should try to get the whole ones. The mashed potatoes are loaded with butter, which is not a good form of fat. All the food you get from the line, you can add your own spices. You have to experiment and make tweaks here and there—everybody is different. What works for one person might not work for the next.

—David Hocker

Eat a balanced diet, with carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. You need all three for energy and tissue repairs—so don’t eliminate any of them.

Try to cut out fried foods. The oil in which most foods are fried contains unhealthy trans fats. Fried food also has a ton of calories and often doesn’t contain the vitamins and minerals needed to maintain and improve health.

Try to eat more leafy green and multicolored vegetables. Veggies, especially colorful ones, are high in vitamins and minerals, fill you up faster because of their high water content, have very few calories, and help food move through the digestive tract because they are high in fiber.

Eat more fruit. Fruits are high in vitamins and minerals. However, they have more calories, because of their naturally occurring sugar.

—Termain Saulsbury
Eighty percent of adults will experience significant low back pain sometime during their lifetime. Low back pain usually involves muscle spasm of the supportive muscles along the spine. Also, pain, numbness and tingling in the buttocks or lower extremity can be related to the back. There are multiple causes of low back pain. It's a good idea to see your health care provider if you have significant pain that lasts more than a week, unexplained fever, unexplained weight loss, redness or swelling on the back or spine, pain/numbness/tingling that travels down the leg below the knee, leg weakness, bowel or bladder problems, or back pain due to a severe blow or fall. If your symptoms do not get better within two to four weeks, see your health care provider.

Perform these exercises slowly, without forcing movement. Be sure to breathe throughout the exercises. You should feel a slight stretch; however, do not move into pain. Your symptoms should not intensify as a result of doing your exercises. Perform the exercises two or three times daily.

**Hamstrings**

Lying on the floor, pull your thigh toward your chest, to about 90 degrees. Straighten your knee until a stretch is felt in the back of the thigh. Hold for a minute. Repeat with opposite leg.

**Single Knee to Chest**

Pull knee in to chest until a comfortable stretch is felt in hip and lower back. Hold 15 seconds. Repeat with opposite leg. Repeat 5-10 times each leg.

**Pelvic Tilt**

Flatten back by tightening stomach and buttock muscles. Hold 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

**Cat and Camel**

On all fours, assume a “hump” back position by arching the back up. Hold briefly, and then slowly lower the back into a sagging position. Repeat 10-15 times.
Hip Flexor Stretch

Lying on your back, pull one knee to the chest to keep the back flat. Allow the opposite thigh to drop over the edge of the bed. Do not allow the thigh to move to the right or left or rotate. Hold 30 seconds. Repeat 2 times each leg.

Prop Up on Elbows

On a firm surface, lying on your stomach, prop up on your elbows. Keep pelvis, hips and legs relaxed. If propping on elbows is painful, try only lying on stomach or with a pillow under your abdomen. Hold 30 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times.

Tail Wag

On all fours with back maintained in neutral position, gently move one hip toward rib cage so that your trunk is bent on one side. Hold briefly, then alternate and do other side. Repeat 10-15 times.

Lumbar Rotation

Slowly rock knees from side to side in a pain-free range of motion. Allow your back to rotate slightly. Repeat 10-15 times.
AIDS Library
Philadelphia FIGHT
1233 Locust Street, 2nd Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107
The library will answer questions about any health condition, not just HIV/AIDS. If you’re in Pennsylvania, you can also request info for re-entry planning.

Center for Health Justice
900 Avila Street #301
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Prison Hotline: 213-229-0979
Free HIV prevention and treatment hotline Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Those being released to Los Angeles County can get help with health care and insurance.

AIDS InfoNet
International Association of Providers of AIDS Care
2200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW,
4th Floor East
Washington, DC 20037
Free factsheets on HIV prevention and treatment in English and 10 other languages. Please ask for “Factsheet 1000.” You can also request summaries of HIV and hepatitis C treatment guidelines, which tell doctors what care to provide in different medical situations.

POZ Magazine
212 West 35th Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10001
A lifestyle, treatment and advocacy magazine for people living with HIV/AIDS. Published 8 times a year. Free subscriptions to HIV-positive people in prison.

Hepatitis Education Project
1621 South Jackson Street, Suite 201
Seattle, WA 98144
Write to request info about viral hepatitis and how you can advocate for yourself to get the treatment you need.
Black and Pink
614 Columbia Rd.
Dorchester, MA 02125
An open family of LGBTQ prisoners and “free world” allies who support each other. Free newsletter and pen pal program for incarcerated LGBTQ people.

Men and Women in Prison Ministries
10 W. 35th Street # 9C5-2
Chicago, IL 60616
For those returning home to the Chicago area, they can answer questions about re-entry, faith, health, and other organizations that can help.

Reproductive Health, Living and Wellness Project
Justice Now
1322 Webster St #210
Oakland, CA 94612
A free 50+ page manual about incarcerated women’s reproductive health. Another manual, Navigating the Medical System, is for women in California prisons.

PEN Writing Program for Prisoners
PEN American Center
588 Broadway, Suite 303
New York, NY 10012
Provides incarcerated people with skilled writing mentors and audiences for their work. Write for a free Handbook for Writers in Prison.

HCV Advocate
P.O. Box 15144
Sacramento, CA 95813
Write to ask for their frequently updated, free factsheets on hepatitis C: HCV information pamphlet, Hepatitis C Treatments, Exposure, Prevention, and/or Side Effects. They can also send one free sample copy of their monthly newsletter.

If you need resources that are not listed here, write to us! We will help you track down answers to your specific questions.

Write to us if you know about a great organization that is not yet listed here.

Prison Legal News
Monthly 72-page magazine on the rights of people in prison and recent court rulings. Sample issue: $5, unused stamps are OK. Subscription: $30/year.

Protecting Your Health & Safety: A Litigation Guide for Inmates
325-page manual explains legal rights to health and safety in prison, and how to advocate for those rights when they are violated. A publication of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Make a $16 check or money order out to Prison Legal News.

Prisoner Diabetes Handbook
A 37-page handbook written by and for people in prison. Free for one copy.
Call for Submissions!

For PHN’s Summer Issue, we are hoping to publish an article about coping with grief and loss. If you have advice you would like to share about how you have coped in the past or information you wish you had known about how to heal, please send your submission to the address on page 2.

PHN is a project of the AIDS Library and the Institute for Community Justice (ICJ) at Philadelphia FIGHT.

For subscriptions and health questions, write to us at:

Prison Health News  
c/o Philadelphia FIGHT  
1233 Locust Street,  
5th Floor  
Philadelphia PA 19107

Please write to us if your address changes.

All subscriptions are FREE