

MANAGING YOUR ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME

(AIDS)

What Is Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome?

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is an infection caused by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which kills or damages the body's immune cells. The body can't fight infections and certain cancers. People with AIDS may get life-threatening opportunistic infections, which are caused by viruses or bacteria that usually don't make healthy people sick.

What Causes AIDS?

HIV infection can result from sexual activity, using an infected needle, or blood transfusion. It also can pass from a mother to her unborn child across the placenta, or to a baby through breastfeeding. AIDS develops when the immune system is so weak that it cannot fight infection, usually months or years after infection with HIV.

What Are the Symptoms of AIDS?

Many people have no symptoms when first infected with HIV. Most stay symptom-free for months or years, even though the virus is active.

Some people have a flulike illness with fever, tiredness, and enlarged lymph nodes (commonly called swollen glands). Blood levels of key infection-fighting cells called CD4-positive T cells or T4 cells start to drop. Other symptoms seen before full-blown AIDS may include lack of energy, weight loss, frequent fevers and sweats, long-lasting or frequent yeast infections, and short-term memory loss. Some people develop herpes infections that cause shingles or mouth, genital, or anal sores.

The most common symptoms of AIDS include infection of the lungs, brain, or eyes. Additional symptoms include trouble thinking, diarrhea, and loss of appetite. Thrush, a fungal infection that causes painful swallowing and a white coating on the tongue, may occur. AIDS increases the risk of skin cancer and lymphoma (a cancer of lymphatic tissue, part of the immune system).

How Is AIDS Diagnosed?

The health care provider will take a medical history, do a physical examination, and test blood for the presence of HIV and other infections. A chest x-ray and other tests may be done.

How Is AIDS Treated?

Medicine will help the immune system fight HIV. A specialist in infectious diseases will help coordinate your care. Several medicines may keep HIV from growing; others may treat additional symptoms. A nutritionist can help plan a healthy diet.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing AIDS

- ✓ **DO** practice safe sex (always use a latex condom).
- ✓ **DO** limit the number of sexual partners.
- ✓ **DO** follow your doctor's directions.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider about all your medicines and medical problems.
- ✓ **DO** tell your sexual partner that you have AIDS so he or she can be tested.
- ✓ **DO** avoid contact with people who have colds or stomach flu.

- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider right away or go to the emergency room if you have a severe headache, fever, cough, severe diarrhea, vomiting, or bad stomach pain, or if bright lights bother you.
- ✓ **DO** talk to someone about managing your stress.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have shortness of breath, new pain or skin lesions, new cough, changes in vision, worse fatigue or weakness, temperature higher than 101° F, trouble staying awake, or confusion.
- ⊗ **DON'T** skip medicine doses or doctor's appointments.
- ⊗ **DON'T** stop taking your medicine unless your health care provider says you should, even if you feel better.
- ⊗ **DON'T** drink too much alcohol or use drugs.
- ⊗ **DON'T** share needles or use injectable drugs.
- ⊗ **DON'T** eat foods such as raw eggs, raw oysters, or unpasteurized milk (they may contain harmful bacteria).
- ⊗ **DON'T** donate blood, sperm, or organs.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Centers for Disease Control: Tel: (800) 232-4636
- Websites: www.healthfinder.gov www.healthanswers.com
www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/hivinf.htm

Copyright © 2021 by Elsevier, Inc.