Buffalo Hump (Lipodystrophy)

A buffalo hump is a pad of fat on the back of the neck. It is a sign of lipodystrophy. This is a problem with how the body makes, uses and stores fat. There are two types:

- **Fat wasting**, where fat is lost from the arms, legs, face and buttocks. This happens more to men.
- **Fat build up**, where fat builds up on the belly, breasts and the back of the neck. This happens more to women.

**Symptoms of Lipodystrophy**

Signs of lipodystrophy include:

- Sunken cheeks, temples and eyes. Veins that stand out more on the arms and legs.
- Fat build up on the belly
- Larger breasts (in both men and women)
- Fatty growths (lipomas) on the body
- High cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- High blood sugar

If the hump is due to HIV or drugs to treat AIDS, it will be made of fat. If the hump is due to osteoporosis or a curved spine, it will be mostly made of bone.

**Causes of and Risk Factors for Lipodystrophy**

Lipodystrophy is due to many causes, including:

- Anti-HIV drugs such as protease inhibitors
- Age
- Excess weight
- Having too much of the hormone insulin in the blood
- Kyphosis
- Long term use of steroids
- Pituitary tumors
- Race (whites are at greatest risk)
- How long a person has had HIV, how advanced it is, and how long a person has been taking anti-HIV drugs

**Preventing Lipodystrophy**

Nothing can prevent lipodystrophy.

Before and during treatment a doctor will check for changes by measuring the arms, thighs, waist, hips and neck.

**Diagnosing Lipodystrophy**

A doctor will take a medical history, do a physical exam and review the anti-HIV drugs a patient has been taking.

Tests may be done to find out the causes of fat build up or loss. These include measuring the body’s hormone levels, X-rays or various scans.

**Treating Lipodystrophy**

Many things can be done to help deal with this disorder, including:

- Changing anti-HIV drugs. This should be done only after talking to a doctor. Changing drugs may not be best for treating HIV in individual cases.
- Diet and exercise. Changing the diet may help cut down on fat build-up. Exercise will help build up muscle.
- Taking drugs that treat the causes of the condition, such as ones to reduce insulin.
• Treating the effects of the condition such as taking drugs that lower cholesterol and triglycerides. This does not treat the lipodystrophy, but may prevent damage to the heart and blood vessels.

Surgery to remove fat build up, such as liposuction, is not yet approved by the FDA for persons with HIV-related lipodystrophy.

For more information:
Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare’s nurse advice line at: (800) 832-0778.