

Cancers

There are many kinds of cancer. People with HIV have a higher risk for certain types of cancer.

Some cancers grow when the immune system is weak. These are linked to late-stage HIV and are a sign of AIDS. Such cancers include Kaposi's sarcoma (KS), cancer of the cervix and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Other cancers happen more often in people with HIV, but are not linked to a weak immune system. They may be due to sex or other things you do in life. These cancers include Hodgkin's disease, some forms of leukemia or cancers of the anus, liver and lungs.

People with HIV do not have increased risk of breast, colon, prostate, or many other common types of cancer.

Signs

The signs of cancer depend on the type and where it is. Some cancers grow more quickly in people with HIV. Some cancers may not show signs or symptoms until the cancer is in a late stage of growth.

Causes

Doctors do not know all the reasons why HIV is linked to certain cancers. A weak immune system is only one known factor. A virus that is harmless in people with a healthy immune system can lead to cancer in a person with HIV. These include:

- Human herpes virus 8 (HHV-8) linked to KS
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) linked to cancers of the cervix and anus
- Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) may be linked to lymphoma
- Hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus

(HCV) may lead to liver cancer

Cancers like KS and brain lymphoma are less likely to occur if a person is in active HIV treatment. HIV meds improve the immune system by raising the CD4 cell counts and that helps protect against these cancers. The rates for other cancers like non-Hodgkin's lymphoma stay the same no matter what the CD4 cell counts are.

Risk Factors

People with HIV who are not on HIV meds are more likely to get cancers that are linked with AIDS. Risks increase when you smoke or drink a lot of alcohol. Certain foods and chemicals raise the risks of some cancers.

Things You Can Do

All people have some cancer risks. You can take these steps for your health:

- Get check-ups, blood tests and tests that screen for cancer. Doctors advise these screening tests:
- HIV positive women should get a Pap test two times (every 6 months) in the first year after they find out they are HIV positive. If both tests are normal, then she can have a Pap test once a year. If one or both of the tests are not normal, she should keep getting a Pap test every 6 months.
- Men should be screened for prostate cancer every year beginning at age 50.
- Both men and women should get screened at age 50 for colon cancer.
- Your doctor may begin screening earlier for certain cancers if you are African American or have a family history of cancer.
- Watch for strange bumps, sores or changes in your body patterns, such as bowel habits
- See a doctor about lumps, sores, blood loss,

fever, weight loss or other changes in your body

- Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. This is part of a healthy diet rich in vitamins, nutrients and fiber.
- Be active and exercise
- Do not smoke
- Limit alcohol use. When you drink, it puts a lot of stress on your body. This raises the risks of liver, mouth, throat and other cancers.
- Avoid street drugs. They stress the body, liver and immune system. Drugs you inject raise the risk of cancers caused by a virus.

How is Cancer Diagnosed?

Some cancers can be found based on their symptoms and a doctor's exam. For other cancers, a blood test may be used to look for markers of cancer.

If your doctor thinks you may have cancer, he or she may order X-rays or other scans (CT scan or MRI) to look for tumors. Some patients may need a biopsy where a small piece of tissue is taken and checked under a microscope to look for cancer cells

Treatment

What kind of treatment you need depends on the type of cancer and how far along it is. HIV can make the treatment harder. Some cancer treatments weaken the immune system even more. A good thing is the meds in HIV treatment help fight cancer.

A special cancer doctor, or oncologist, should be seen for treatment. It helps if he or she has worked with people with HIV before.

Common cancer treatments include:

- Chemotherapy. Meds are either put into your vein or taken as pills. They target and kill cancer cells. HIV meds improve a person's

response to this treatment. Some chemo has a lot of side effects such as nausea, hair loss and weakness. Your doctor can prescribe meds to help with the side effects of chemo.

- Radiation. This kills cancer or shrinks cancer cells with high-energy beams, such as X-rays. The beam is focused on the area where the cancer was found. It may burn the skin where it is focused.
- Surgery to remove tumors. It is often followed by chemotherapy and radiation or both.
- Meds prescribed by your doctor. Some help keep cancer in check.

For more information

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare's Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

