Encephalopathy (Dementia)

Encephalopathy is the name of several brain problems linked to AIDS that cause memory problems. These problems can be very mild or severe. There are many names for these problems. Some are worse than others.

- HIV encephalopathy
- HIV-associated progressive encephalopathy in children
- HIV-associated dementia
- HIV mild neurocognitive disorder
- Asymptomatic neurocognitive impairment

HIV meds make the severe problems much less common.

Signs

This disease can cause:

- Loss of interest in life, other people, hobbies or sex. A boredom with life.
- Memory problems
- Lack of focus
- Forget things like taking your meds
- Problems on your job
- Loss of bladder control
- Slow hand movements
- Struggle to find words when you talk
- Shaky or clumsy movements
- Need to re-read things a few times
- Not able to follow what you watch on TV

The signs may not seem bad at first. If you do not treat them, they will get worse. Babies may grow at a slower pace and adults can go into a coma.

Causes

This condition is caused when:

HIV blocks how your brain cells talk to each other and how they talk to the rest of your body

How to Know You Have Encephalopathy

You will need a doctor's exam to know you have this illness.

He or she may order:

- A mental status exam. This checks how well a person can recall things, focus, move, learn, talk and use words and ideas.
- A spinal tap. This takes fluid from around the brain and spinal cord to make sure you don't have an infection other than HIV.
- Blood tests to make sure you don't have syphilis, thyroid disease or low b12
- Tests that look at your brain, such as a CT or MRI scan
- A doctor to help manage depression
- A visit to a brain doctor

Treatment

HIV meds are the best way to treat this. Sometimes your doctor may give you meds that get into the brain better.

Your doctor may suggest certain vitamins. Thyroid pills can be taken if thyroid levels are low. Certain meds that help fight depression and mental health problems can help.

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Other ways to treat this disease are:

- Stay active. Daily exercise helps the brain work better. It helps if you are depressed or anxious.
- Challenge the mind. Puzzles, games, a good book and hobbies and crafts work the brain.
- Time with others. Visit with friends and loved ones. This keeps the mind active and balanced.
- Diet. Eat a balanced, healthy diet with lots of fruits and vegetables. This helps keep your body strong and work better.
- Tobacco. Do not smoke or use tobacco products. Nicotine cuts down blood flow.

Prevention

HIV meds are the best way to prevent this disease.

For more information
Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call PHP Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

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