



Lactic Acidosis

Lactate is a waste that is made when the body's cells make energy. When you use your muscles, they make lactic acid and lactate.

The liver breaks down lactate. When there is too much lactate in the body, the liver cannot keep up. The extra lactate builds up in the blood. This is called lactic acidosis. It can be fatal.

People who take the class of HIV medications (meds) called nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs) have a mild increase in lactic acid. Lactic acidosis is a rare side effect.

Symptoms

Common signs of lactic acidosis include:

- Heart beat problems
- Cold or blue hands and feet
- Feeling very tired most of the time
- Sick to stomach, throwing up and stomach pain
- Severe weakness in the limbs
- Shortness of breath or fast breath
- Tender on the right side under the rib cage. This may be a sign of a swollen liver.
- Tingles and pain in the fingers and toes
- Weight loss

Causes and Risk Factors

Lactic acidosis is caused by damage to the parts of the cells that make energy. It can also happen if the liver cannot get rid of the lactate out of the blood.

It has been linked to HIV meds. NRTIs cause the liver to store fat, which does not allow the liver to break down lactate the right way.

The risk of lactic acidosis is greater if you:

- Take certain NRTI meds
- Are overweight
- Have a low CD4 count
- Are a woman
- Are pregnant
- Are in the late stages of HIV and do not get enough food
- Take medicine to treat hepatitis C

How to Know You Have Lactic Acidosis

A doctor may perform blood tests. A CT scan or ultrasound may check for a swollen liver.

Treatment

Treatment depends on how severe the problem is. A person with mildly high lactate levels may not have to make any changes.

Prevention

There are no tests to see who is at risk. A person on NRTIs should stay alert for symptoms. See a doctor right away if you notice any signs.

In extreme cases, you may need to stop NRTIs. This should never be done before you talk to a doctor.

For more information

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

