

Known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome AIDS occurs after the immune system has been destroyed by HIV virus.

HIV attacks the immune system by killing off the white blood cells in the blood known as the T-Cells. It is these cells that signal to the body's defence system when an invasion of bacteria or viruses has occurred. As a result the body produces anti-bodies which attack and destroy harmful bacteria and viruses.

AIDS patients are vulnerable to infections and cancers and it is these infections and cancers which cause death. HIV changes the structure of the cells it attacks.

What to look for...

The following are common symptoms to look for-

- Unexplainable fatigue.
- Swollen lymph nodes.
- Fevers that lasts more than 10 days.
- Night sweats.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Purplish or discoloured lesions on skin that do not go away.
- Persistent, unexplained cough or sore throat.
- Shortness of breath.
- Persistent colds, diarrhoea, yeast infections
- Easy bruising or bleeding that cannot be explained.

A diagnosis of AIDS should not be taken as an immediate death sentence. With proper care the AIDS sufferer may stave off the worst symptoms and live a productive life for many years.

Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is not a single disease in itself. Rather, a severely impaired immune system leaves the AIDS sufferer highly susceptible to a whole host of infections and diseases. AIDS is thought to be caused by the human immune deficiency virus (HIV), which is spread through infected semen, vaginal fluids, and blood. Contrary to popular belief, AIDS is not a highly contagious disease. The only way you can get it is to have unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex with an infected partner or to share tainted blood through IV-drug use or transfusions.

Risk Groups

At greatest risk for AIDS are people who have sex without using condoms and infants born to AIDS-infected mothers. Also at great risk are male and female intravenous-drug users who share needles, and people who received blood transfusions or clotting factors between 1977 and 1985, prior to the establishment of standard AIDS screening of donated blood.

You also need not worry about catching AIDS if you live with someone who has it. HIV cannot be transmitted by toilet seats or objects handled by people who have AIDS.

Traditional Treatment

If you feel you have contracted the virus you should have a test as soon as possible. Within a few weeks of infection, your body should be producing antibodies to the virus, which your doctor can detect in blood tests. However, your body may take as long as 35 months to produce a detectable level of antibodies, so if you think you've been infected, particularly if you're in a high-risk group, you should be tested for the disease every 6 months.

It is extremely important that you notify your sexual partners of your diagnosis. They too must be tested and treated.

Almost everyone who develops full-blown AIDS eventually succumbs to the disease, but antibiotic and antiviral drugs can prolong life for several years. In any event, you should never try to treat yourself for this life-threatening illness:

Always seek the advice of a qualified practitioner. And beware of claims made for "miracle" cures. They simply don't exist.

Currently there are several hundred human studies to test drugs for the treatment of AIDS and related conditions. These include antiviral drugs, drugs that modify the immune system, anti-infective drugs, and anti-cancer drugs.

Although a number of vaccines to prevent AIDS are under investigation, scientists have had difficulty finding one that works.

Alternative/Natural Treatments

Combined with medical treatment, many alternative therapies have been successful in improving the patient's quality of life. By law, alternative therapists are not permitted to treat AIDS/HIV patients. Although, if you have the support of your doctor, these remedies may be of benefit in relieving some of the symptoms. AIDS patients have responded well to nutritional programs aimed at improving their immune system function. Also any program which aims to relax the patient and decrease stress has been beneficial.

Again, beware of any treatment that claims to be a "miracle" cure.

- Regular massages
- Try some Bach flower remedies -
- Mimulus (for fear of illness or death),
- Sweet Chestnut (for despair),
- Pine (for guilt),
- Willow (for resentment).

Chinese herbs help to boost the immune system. However it is vital to see a professional and fully qualified practitioner. Some suggested herbs are -

- Green Tea,
- some Ginseng,
- Maitake mushroom and
- Shiitake mushroom.
- Use of certain Aromatherapy oils to reduce stress levels
- A healthy diet with moderate exercise
- Herbs such as...
- Echinacea,
- Astragalus,
- Cat's Claw,
- Chaparral,
- Liquorice (root),
- European Mistletoe and
- Garlic help the immune system.

As well as

- Aloe vera (juice consumed orally),
- the minerals Zinc and Germanium,
- the vitamin A derivative - Beta Carotene,
- Selenium,
- Lactobacillus acidophilus,
- Coenzyme Q10 can often help.

As well as this you may want to investigate the benefits of taking extra Vitamin A and B12 and C. However, always speak with your doctor as Vitamin A can be toxic in high doses.

- Heat therapy - raising the body's temperature above normal levels - with medical supervision may help control the HIV virus.
- Mind/body work with a psychologist or counsellor
- Also Yoga and meditation may be of benefit
- Try joining a support group

Also some ideas to help yourself at home:-

- eat nutritious, balanced meals to bolster your immune system.
- take vitamin supplements such as the ones mentioned above.
- try acupressure exercises to relax.
- take up meditation or yoga to relieve stress.
- try to maintain a positive attitude.
- follow a moderate exercise program approved by your doctor.
- try inhaling or bathing with oils of tea tree and garlic.
- ask a knowledgeable practitioner about herbs such as St.-John's-wort.

When to seek further professional advice

If you have more than one of the symptoms listed in the description section of this condition or if you think you may have contracted the disease.