

A Closer Look at Kaposi's Sarcoma

Kaposi's sarcoma, or KS, is a cancer-like disease that affects up to 20% of people with AIDS who are not taking antiretroviral therapy (ART). It is partly caused by a herpes virus called HHV-8. KS usually shows up in the skin or in the linings of the mouth, nose, or eye.

It's one of the most visible signs of AIDS, because it usually shows

up as spots on the skin (lesions) that look red or purple on white skin, and bluish, brownish, or black on dark skin. Lesions often occur on the face, arms, and legs. If you notice new dark spots on your skin, have your health care provider look at them to see if you might have KS.

KS isn't typically deadly, but it can be if it spreads. Strong ART is the best treatment and prevention for KS. In many people, ART can stop the growth of skin lesions and clear them up.

Source: TheBody.com (<http://www.thebody.com/content/treat/art6061.html>).



Do I Need the Flu Vaccine?

Yes! People with HIV are at high risk of getting influenza, or the flu. Getting vaccinated with a flu shot can produce an immune response that helps you fight influenza viruses. This year, immunocompromised individuals are also recommended to get a second vaccination to protect against the H1N1 flu, or "swine flu."

The flu can lead to serious illnesses. In almost all cases, people living with HIV should get vaccinated for the flu. However, the rules for not getting the flu vaccine are the same for those without HIV as those who have the virus. Anyone with a history of severe allergy to hens' eggs should not get vaccinated. The same is true for those with a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome during the 6 weeks after vaccination.

People with advanced HIV may not get a good response from the flu vaccine. In these cases, chemoprophylaxis—the use of antiviral drugs for prevention—should be considered. This is especially true if it's likely that you could be exposed to people with the flu.

Source: CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/hiv-flu.htm>).



Healthy Living With HIV

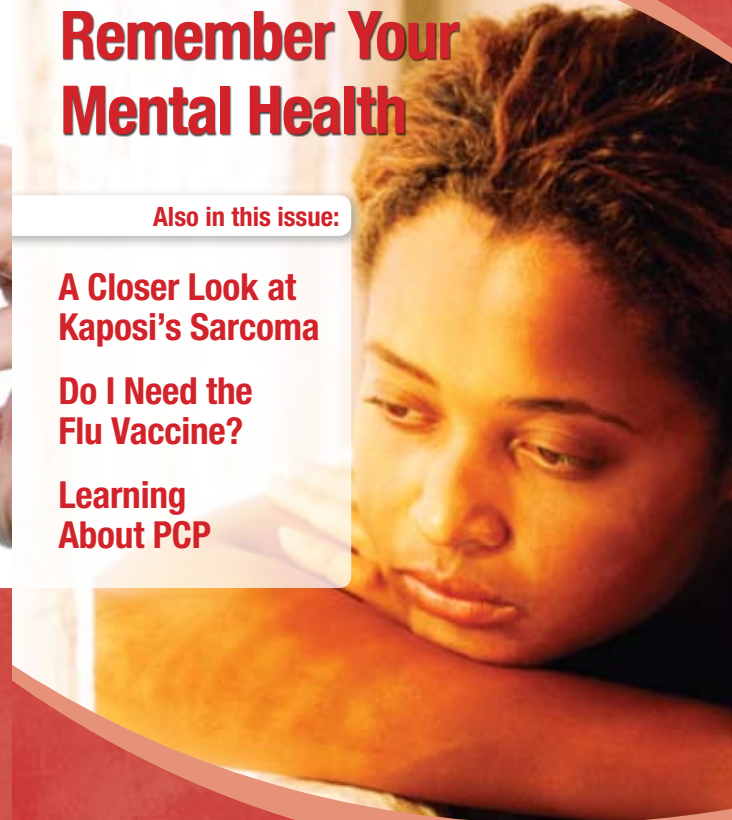
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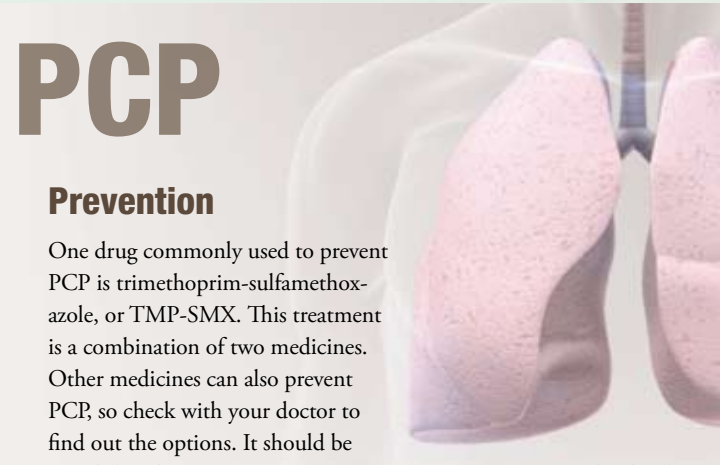
Learning about PCP

Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, or PCP, is a severe illness that some people with HIV or AIDS may get. In fact, it's the most common serious infection among persons with HIV.

The most common symptoms of PCP are fever, cough, or trouble breathing. People with PCP may die if it isn't treated quickly. It can be tough to prevent exposure to PCP, but there are things you can do to reduce your chances.

How Do You Catch PCP?

It is believed that PCP is spread in the air, but it's still unknown if it lives in the soil or someplace else. The PCP germ is very common. Since it's difficult to prevent exposure to PCP, you should get medical care to prevent PCP.



Prevention

One drug commonly used to prevent PCP is trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, or TMP-SMX. This treatment is a combination of two medicines. Other medicines can also prevent PCP, so check with your doctor to find out the options. It should be noted that the pneumonia vaccine protects you against another kind of pneumonia, but not against PCP. There is no vaccine for PCP.

Who Needs Treatment?

You should have your blood tested regularly to check the strength of your immune system. Your doctor should prescribe TMP-SMX to prevent PCP if your CD4 cell count falls below 200. Your doctor may also put you on TMP-SMX if you show certain symptoms, such as having a temperature above 100°F that lasts for 2 weeks or longer, or if you get thrush. Having thrush may raise your risk for getting PCP. If you have already had PCP, you can get it again. TMP-SMX should be taken even after you have had PCP to prevent getting it again.

Source: CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/brochures/pcpb.htm>).

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Remember Your Mental Health

Patients can't forget the importance of thinking about mental health. Knowing about the impact of depression, anxiety, and other psychological issues can have a positive effect on the well-being of people with HIV.

Depression

Some patients with HIV may find it harder and harder to wake up in the morning. They may be going to bed earlier and earlier each night, and may not look forward to activities they used to enjoy, like walking the dog or attending social functions. In some cases, patients may get so depressed that they begin to wonder if it's even worth it to keep taking medications.

Table Depression: Spotting the Symptoms

If you experience 5 or more of these symptoms for at least 2 weeks, talk with your healthcare provider about depression.

- Sadness or hopelessness
- Decreased interest or pleasure in activities
- Sleeping too much or sleeping too little
- Appetite changes with weight gain or loss
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Decreased ability to concentrate
- Psychomotor agitation (pacing, wringing hands, hair twirling) or psychomotor retardation (slowing down of thoughts, movement, or speech)
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

Source: TheBody.com (<http://www.thebody.com/content/living/art39207.html>).

Depression can be a debilitating illness and is quite common throughout the United States. Depression is one of the most common mental health problems among people with HIV. Symptoms of depression (Table) can overlap with medication side effects. A lot of times, depression can be missed by both the person with the symptoms and the health care provider.

The good news is depression is very treatable. You can get back to your old self, especially if you address your symptoms early, reach out for care, and get an experienced provider who listens to you. Treating depression is very important for both your mental and physical health. There are many effective therapies for depression, including several different classes of antidepressant drugs and various types of counseling and psychotherapy. Most mental health providers will treat you with a combination of drugs and psychotherapy for at least 6 months.

Anxiety

Anxiety often goes hand in hand with depression. However, anxiety can occur by itself too. Anxiety can cause psychological symptoms like excessive worry or fear, as well as physiological symptoms. These symptoms may include breathing problems, chest palpitations, muscle tension, nausea, headache, and dizziness.

There are many triggers for anxiety, including getting an AIDS diagnosis, changing antiretroviral drugs, and other serious changes in health status. Just like depression, treatment for anxiety usually includes a combination of drugs and psychological interventions. Psychotherapy and/or cognitive-behavioral therapy have also been shown to be helpful with anxiety.

Addiction

Some people use alcohol or recreational drugs to help them relax or have fun. However, it can sometimes be tough to tell when “use” becomes “abuse” or “addiction.” When determining if you have an alcohol or drug problem, ask yourself these 4 questions:

1. Have you ever felt like you should cut down on your drinking or drug use?
2. Have you been annoyed by people criticizing your drinking or drug use?
3. Have you felt bad or guilty about your drinking or drug use?
4. Have you ever had a drink or used drugs early in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, you may have a problem with alcohol or drugs. Short- and long-term effects of drug use vary, so it's important to know about any substance you use. There are also resources available for help, including the Anxiety Disorders Association of America, the Harm Reduction Coalition, and 12steps.org.

Source: TheBody.com (<http://www.thebody.com/content/living/art39207.html>).

Getting Through the Holidays

As the onset of the holiday season approaches, so too might expectations that come with them. Here are 8 simple rules for managing those “holiday blues”:

1. Schedule time for yourself.
2. Remember the importance of a healthy diet.
3. Make exercise a priority.
4. Find your support network of family and friends.
5. Commit to a regular sleep schedule.
6. Manage your stress (eg, meditation or deep-breathing exercises).
7. Hold on to whatever routines you have.
8. Remain true to yourself and what makes you happy.

Source: TheBody.com (<http://www.thebody.com/content/living/art32255.html>).

It's important to pay attention to your mental health just like you do with your physical health. Address any concerns early. To live well with HIV means you need to take care of your whole self. That means your mind as well as your body.

