

Image Article

Progression of HIV Infection

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INTRODUCTION

Without diagnosis, HIV infection is progressing in stages, slowly getting worse. HIV is progressively destroying the immune system and ultimately causing acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). There is no cure for HIV, but HIV medication (called antiretroviral therapy or ART) will delay or prevent progression from one point to the next. HIV drugs are helping people living with HIV longer, safer lives. The three stages of HIV infection are (1) acute HIV infection, (2) chronic HIV infection, and (3) AIDS.

Acute HIV infection is the earliest stage of HIV infection, which usually occurs within 2-4 weeks of HIV infection. Many may have flu-like symptoms during this period, including fever, headache and rash. In the acute stage of infection, HIV is quickly growing and spreading all over the body. The second stage of HIV infection is chronic HIV infection (also called a clinical delay or asymptomatic HIV infection). HIV continues to multiply in the body during this stage but at very low levels. Individuals with recurrent HIV infection may have no symptoms related to HIV. AIDS is the highest, severest level of HIV infection. Because HIV has badly weakened the immune system, the body cannot resist opportunistic infections. (Infections that occur more often or are more severe in people with compromised immune systems than in those with strong immune systems are opportunistic infections and infection-related cancers.) If you have advanced HIV (with symptoms that describe AIDS), it's important that you get the right treatment as soon as possible. With care, a person can recover and manage HIV from AIDS-related infections and diseases.

