Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS): After Your Visit

Your Kaiser Permanente Care Instructions

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the body’s immune system, making it hard for the body to fight infection and disease. HIV causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). AIDS is the last and most severe stage of the HIV infection.

After HIV enters the body, it attacks and destroys a type of white blood cell called CD4+ cells, or helper cells. These white blood cells are an important part of the immune system.

You have AIDS when one or both of the following are true:

- Your CD4+ cell count is below 200 cells per microliter (μL) of blood.
- You develop certain infections or cancers that are usually only seen in people who have problems with their immune system.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It’s also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Get the immunizations and medicine you need to prevent infections such as pneumonia or tuberculosis.
- Learn more about HIV and AIDS so you can be active in your health care decisions.
- Join a support group to share experiences and seek support from others in the same situation.
• Do not smoke. People with HIV have an increased risk of heart attacks and lung cancer. Smoking increases these risks even more. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
• Do not use illegal drugs, and limit your use of alcohol.
• Eat a healthy, balanced diet to keep your immune system as strong as you can.
• Exercise regularly to reduce stress, increase energy, and lift your mood.
• If you have not already done so, prepare a list of advance directives. These are instructions to your doctor and family members about what kind of care you want if you become unable to speak for yourself.

Helping a partner with AIDS

If your partner has AIDS, you can help provide emotional, physical, and medical care that will improve his or her quality of life.

• Provide emotional support, such as listening to and encouraging your partner.
• Protect yourself and others against HIV infection and other infections by not sharing needles.
• Protect yourself and others by always using condoms during sex.
• Protect your partner by staying away from him or her when you are sick.
• Take care of yourself by sharing your experiences with others and getting help when you need it.
• Learn how to give medicines, and know where to get help in an emergency.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

• You have seizures.
• You passed out (lost consciousness).
• You have severe shortness of breath.
• You have new, sudden weakness or a change in feeling in an arm, a leg, or on one side of your body.
• You cannot move part of your body.
Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

• You have shortness of breath.
• You have a cough that brings up mucus (sputum) from the lungs.
• You have an ongoing headache.
• You have changes in vision.
• You have personality changes or a decline in mental skills, such as feeling confused, disoriented, or not able to do mental tasks that you could do in the past.
• You have unusual sores on your skin or in your mouth.
• You have a fever.
• You have ongoing diarrhea.
• You have unusual bleeding (such as from your nose or gums), blood in your urine or stool, or easy bruising.
• You have severe numbness or pain in your hands and feet.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

• You have increased outbreaks of cold sores.
• You have sores, bumps, rashes, blisters, or warts in your genital or anal area.
• You have swelling of lymph nodes in your neck, armpits, or groin.
• You have lost weight.
• You have night sweats.
• You feel very tired.

Where can you learn more?

Go to http://www.kp.org

Enter J588 in the search box to learn more about “Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS): After Your Visit”.

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