

Microsporidiosis

Microsporidiosis is an infection that can affect many parts of the body. The brain, eyes, kidneys and other organs could be at risk. It most often affects the bowels. People with CD4 cell counts of less than 100 are most likely to get this illness. People can die from this parasite.

It is harder to treat HIV if a person has this infection. The parasites make it hard for the body to absorb HIV medications (meds) well.

Symptoms

The main sign is watery stool. There may also be stomach pain, gas and you may feel sick to your stomach. Microsporidiosis can cause you to lose hunger, fluids and weight.

The signs may come and go for months. Not all people who get exposed show the signs.

Causes

The fungus that causes the infection lives in human and animal bowel movements (poop).

It spreads when the parasites get into food, water or pools. It can also be spread by oral-anal sex.

How to Know You Have Microsporidiosis

The parasites are very small and hard to see. A doctor can order a stool test to check for common parasites.

A doctor may check if the infection has spread. They can run tests on samples of pee or water used to flush your nose.

Many doctors treat this disease even if they are not sure it is caused by the parasite. If the loose stool goes away, it was most likely microsporidiosis.

Treatment

There is not one treatment that always kills the parasites. A wide range of parasites can cause microsporidiosis.

The drug Albenza® (albendazole) is often used. It works well against some, but not all, parasites. It can take two months or more to work. It is hard to absorb. Pregnant women should not take it. It may cause birth defects.

The best treatment is to take your HIV meds. This makes the immune system stronger and helps raise CD4 cell counts above 100.

Loose stool makes it hard to digest HIV meds. It may help to grind up the pills. Check with your doctor before you grind pills. Some meds must be taken whole.

You must try to treat the loose stool. Over the counter treatments can help. They do not kill the parasites, but they can stop the symptoms.

Symptoms that last for a long time can cause wasting. You should regain any weight lost. Eat healthy amounts of the right food. You can lift weights to fight muscle loss.

Over-the-counter pain killers help with the side effects of the infection.

If this illness makes you not want to eat, certain meds may help restore your hunger.

Prevention

Wash your hands well before you handle food and after you use the bathroom.

Keep food clean. Wash meat before you cook it. Clean and peel fruits and vegetables.

Try not to swallow water when you swim or use a hot tub.

Avoid or practice safer oral-anal sex. Use a latex barrier such as a dental dam or a condom. Plastic wrap also works.

For more information

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

