

Wasting

Wasting is the unplanned loss of more than 10% of a person's body weight. This can happen after a month of loose stool or weakness and fever. Wasting is a sign that HIV has a stronger hold on the body.

This is not the same as facial wasting (lipoatrophy). Facial wasting is the loss of fat under the skin. It makes the face look thin. Facial wasting is not a sign of stronger HIV infection.

Signs

Signs of wasting are:

- Loose stool or weakness and fever for a month or longer
- Loss of more than 10% of the body's weight without a diet
- Loss of both fat and muscle
- Face and limbs get very thin

Causes

Wasting can happen for many reasons.

- Not enough to eat. HIV and HIV meds can make a person not want to eat. It can make you sick to your stomach. It can change your sense of taste. Mouth or throat infections such as thrush can make it painful to eat. Infections of the gut may make people feel full after they eat just a little food. Also, lack of money or energy may make it hard to afford or prepare food.
- Changes in how the body absorbs and uses food. People with HIV may get infections that affect how food is absorbed. Loose stool can cause a loss of calories and nutrients. People with HIV need more calories just to keep the same body weight. This may be because the immune system is more active.

- Hormone changes. HIV changes some hormone levels. This can affect how the body breaks down and uses food.
- High cytokine levels. Cytokines are proteins. High cytokines cause the body to make more fats and sugars and to make less protein.

When two or more of these are at work, the wasting gets worse.

How to Know if You Have Wasting

A doctor will ask about your past health problems and may order a CD4 count. Signs of wasting often show up when the CD4 count falls below 350.

Treatment

There is not just one right way to treat wasting. There are many ways to treat it.

Options include:

- Help build hunger with prescribed meds.
- Treat loose stool and infections.
- Nutritional substitutes. There are products that provide nutrients in easy-to-absorb and easy to buy and use forms.
- Train or work out with weights. This helps the body build muscle.

Prevention

Persons with HIV infection should:

- Watch their weight closely
- Eat more fruit and vegetables and less fatty, salty foods
- Treat loose stool or any gut problems right away

For more information

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