

Symptomatic HIV

What is meant by Symptomatic HIV?

HIV infection usually goes through 4 stages: acute infection when you first get infected; then asymptomatic infection when you have the virus in your body and it is reproducing millions of times daily but you don't feel bad at all; symptomatic HIV where the HIV is causing you to have problems or feel bad such as having frequent fevers; and AIDS which is when your CD4 count has dropped below 200 and you are more at risk for unusual infections.

What kinds of symptoms might I get?

When they first catch HIV, many people have what feels like mono (the disease a lot of teenagers get) where they feel really run down, have fevers, swollen glands, and weight loss. This usually only lasts 1-2 weeks then they feel better. From months to years later they may again experience these symptoms, especially the unexplained weight loss or fevers or lymphadenopathy (swollen glands). This may be when they have symptomatic HIV because their HIV viral load (the amount of virus in their blood) may be getting higher. These symptoms could be due to HIV itself or possibly other infections.

Does symptomatic HIV mean I am about to develop AIDS?

Some patients develop symptoms very early while their CD4 cells remain pretty high but others develop them after they already have AIDS. It varies person to person. Blood tests to measure your CD4 cells are needed to tell you how far along in the disease you are.

How do I treat it?

Usually your primary care provider (doctor or nurse practitioner) uses your CD4 cell count and your viral load to decide if you need HIV medications yet. If you do have symptoms though from the HIV, frequently you will be given HIV medications to treat the symptoms even if your counts are good. It is extremely important you take your medications every dose every day to treat your disease and prevent resistance from developing.

If you have further questions, be sure to talk to your primary care provider or your health educator or nurse.



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