

Body Shape Changes with HAART

What are body shape changes?

Some medications used to treat HIV can cause changes in the way the body looks, either with decreases or increases of fat in different places. These are called either Lipodystrophy or Lipoatrophy.

Who gets these changes?

Anyone can get these changes just from having HIV but they are more common with the use of certain medications. The ones most likely to cause the fatty deposits (lipodystrophy) are the protease inhibitors and the ones most likely to cause the fat loss (lipoatrophy) are the nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors. White older male patients are more likely to get these but they can occur in any age or race or gender of patient. The other classes of HIV medications have not been shown to cause these shape changes.

What do these changes look like?

Lipoatrophy is the loss of fat tissue. It most commonly occurs either in the face with a deepening of the folds of skin from the nose down past the mouth and sinking in of the cheeks. There can also be loss of fat from the arms, legs, and buttocks, giving skinny and veiny arms or legs or a flattened butt.

Lipodystrophy is fat deposits. These most commonly occur at the top of the spine (“buffalo hump”), below the chin, in the breast area, or within the belly. They can also occur at other places in the body, giving fatty lumps called lipomas.

How do I treat these?

Lipoatrophy usually is treated by changing the medicine causing it. There can also be implants of small silicone beads or polylactic acid put into the face or cheeks which may help with the sunken areas. Lipodystrophy is best helped by exercise and watching your diet to keep fat intake down. Changing medications may also help with this. You should consult with a nutritionist.

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



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