

H E L P O U T

AIDS prevention/ Life extension

by Patrick Caplis, N.D.

Since the first cases of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) were reported in 1979, we have traveled a long way. It is now generally accepted that AIDS is caused by a new strain of virus, the human T-lymphotropic virus III, also known as HTLV-III. The virus is thought to specifically attack certain cells in the body's immune system, inhibiting the function of these cells and often killing them.

The immune system is the body's primary means of defense against disease-causing organisms. And it is the immune system which initiates the inflammatory response which occurs when you get a sliver in your finger or when you start sneezing around that

cat you know you're allergic to. Our immune system is composed of several different body organs and many types of chemical substances and cells. One class of white blood cells, B-lymphocytes, defend the body by creating antibodies to bacteria and viruses before they can impair cells. A second class of white blood cells, T-lymphocytes, are the central defense of the "cellular" immune system. T-lymphocytes detect invading organisms and malignant cells and directly or indirectly bring about their destruction.

In persons with AIDS, this cellular immune system fails. The AIDS virus attacks T-lymphocytes, resulting in abnormally low levels of "T-helper cells" which stimulate the immune system, and higher levels of "T-suppressor cells" which inhibit the function of the immune system. This imbalance, called a reverse T-cell ratio, can lead to a strong vulnerability to "opportunistic" infec-

tions, rarely seen except in individuals whose immune system has been disabled by genetic deficiency, chemotherapy, or age. Such infections include *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia and the rare cancer Kaposi's sarcoma. With a severely disabled immune system, new infections or malignancies often continue to develop, and in most cases, this progression, developing one disease after another, is so debilitating that the person eventually dies.

Experts at the recent AIDS conference in Atlanta estimate that one million Americans may have already been exposed to the AIDS virus. So far 9,600 Americans have contracted AIDS, and the Center for Disease Control expects the number to double by this time next year. The AIDS epidemic is worsening.

It is time for all of us to think seriously about a preventive medicine approach to AIDS. There is at present no treatment proven effective for the immune system failure in AIDS, and the discovery of a vaccine remains a distant prospect. The only known method of preventing AIDS is to avoid exposure.

I recently attended SAFESEX WORKSHOP II here in Portland. In the recent past, many researchers have stressed the promiscuous sexual behavior of AIDS victims as a possible factor in their having contracted the disease. Now more emphasis is being placed not so much on the number of sexual contacts but more on high versus low risk sexual activity. Because AIDS is transmitted primarily through body fluids, particularly blood and semen, high risk sexual activities are those in which there is a high risk of body fluid exchange between two individuals. Examples of high risk sexual activities are anal intercourse and fisting. Both are considered potentially dangerous because of the possibility of producing microscopic tears in the rectum which would allow exchange of blood and semen. Low risk sexual activities include mutual masturbation and passive oral sex.

At this point, I part company with some of my more orthodox medical peers. Any standard medical textbook will tell you that there are *two* requirements for any infectious disease to occur: 1) the presence of a pathogenic (disease-producing) organism such as a virus or bacterium, and 2) a susceptible host which provides a favorable environment where disease-causing organisms can grow and reproduce. Putting so much emphasis on the HTLV-III virus as *the* cause of AIDS tends to overshadow the fact that the AIDS virus, like any other pathogen, requires a susceptible host organism in order to produce a disease state. But how can we identify those individuals more likely to develop AIDS when exposed to the virus. At present, not much is known.

It is, however, my subjective opinion that healthy people do not get sick, or at least not very sick or very often. Living according to the laws of health tends to decrease the likelihood of serious illness. The problem is that most people have very little idea what the laws of health might be. Most of us did not learn much about health at home or in school or in the doctor's office. And even if a person does have knowledge about how to be healthy, it is quite another thing to actually struggle to *be* healthy! So no wonder people get sick a lot.

Over the years, I have evolved my own set of health guidelines. These are not the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets; each of us is an individual with different biochemical and psychosocial needs. As you use this rather general information to help you evolve your own healthful lifestyle, try to be flexible and accepting of who *you* are as a person.

In a total approach to health, I feel the following things are important:

GENETICS: You are, in some respects, the person your parents made you. We cannot at present alter the genetic material we were born with; we can only strive to do the best we can with what we've got. See below.

NUTRITION: Most Americans eat a diet high in fats, proteins and simple sugars, and relatively low in complex carbohydrates (whole grains, beans, fruits and vegetables). Modern day nutritionists advocate exactly the opposite: 60-70% of our calories should come from complex carbohydrates, 20-30% from protein foods, 15-20% from fats. It is important to eat some raw food daily, and I also encourage people to take a good multi-vitamin/mineral supplement every day. Sunlight, clean air and lots of pure water are also nutritional requirements.

EXERCISE: Groan! It's not as bad as you think. You don't have to jog fifty miles a week or play rackets until you drop from exhaustion. Thirty minutes of brisk walking 3-4 times a week is a good amount of exercise. Individuals on a weight-loss program usually have to do more. What is important is to make exercise a regular part of your life. If you have a heart condition, other serious medial problem or you are over forty years old, see your doctor before starting an exercise program.

STRESS: A certain amount of stress in our lives is healthful and normal, but chronic high-level stress can be detrimental. Too much work or too much play can make you sick. Too much failure or too much success can kill you.

DRUG USE: A little goes a long way because *all* drugs have some toxic effects. Social drugs like alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, amyl nitrite (poppers) and nicotine all have direct adverse effects on certain body organs. Sugar is a drug-like substance which, among other things, inhibits some functions of the immune system.

REST/RELAXATION: Time out for minds and bodies to unwind and repair. Sleep deprivation may leave you cranky, foggy-brained and low-energy. Relax and smell the flowers — often.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE, FAITH, LOVE: Our minds can be powerful tools in promoting the health of our bodies. Some of the nation's most prestigious research institutions are now exploring the intricate connection between mind and body. There is growing evidence that you can literally think yourself sick and you can also think yourself back to health. So think positive!

MENTAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH: Emotional expression is a part of being healthy. People who are emotionally constipated stuff their emotions and allow a huge build-up of tension in their bodies which may contribute to high blood pressure, cancer, migraines, etc. Each of us must strive to know and love and accept the person we are and the world we live in. We need to be touched, and we need to be loved.

By *gradually* adopting such a health program, I think you will find that you feel much better day to day, and that overall you will tend to get sick much less often. My own opinion is that you will also be much less likely to contract a life-threatening illness like AIDS. Furthermore, you will be more likely to remain healthy even as you age, and chances are good that you will live a long life. Good health is not an accident, we create it day by day. So . . . go for it!

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