Holding Back the Years

ARV therapy and HIV-caused aging

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Today, people with HIV live longer, healthier lives because they take antiretroviral (ARV) meds. But findings show folks living with the virus are more likely to develop age-related illnesses, such as hypertension, heart disease and impaired kidney function, compared with those who don't have HIV. What's more, scientists are looking at the long-term effects—both good and bad—of these life-saving antiretrovirals.

At the 20th International AIDS Conference held in Melbourne, Australia, in 2014, researcher Peter Reiss, MD, PhD, a professor of internal medicine at the University of Amsterdam, presented findings that showed certain ARVs stopped cells from dividing and replicating, which caused them to grow old before their time. "We need to keep an open mind that some of the drugs that we are using may affect these mechanisms [of aging]," Reiss says.

Reiss and many other scientists agree that the connection between the effects of aging and ARVs needs to be studied further.

In the meantime, it's key that people living with HIV embrace a healthy lifestyle and begin ARV treatment as soon as possible.

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