HIV and Dementia

What is the connection?

September 5, 2016 By Kate Ferguson

When 50-year-old Ali Watson started to notice that he was becoming increasingly forgetful, he became alarmed. Watson is living with HIV, and he's aware that a disorder called AIDS dementia complex (ADC), sometimes called HIV-associated dementia, or HAD, is one of the few illnesses the virus can cause directly.

This happens because when HIV first enters the body, the virus can pass into the brain and damage nerve cells located there. This is also possible even if someone's CD4, or T-cell (a type of white blood cell), count is higher than 200, which doctors consider to be healthy.

Since he'd started antiretroviral treatment Watson's CD4 count stayed high and never dipped below the target mark. But knowing ADC could strike despite his rockstar CD4 numbers, he was concerned.

Then, Watson's doctor reassured him that the condition is more likely to happen if someone's CD4 cell count falls below 200. In addition, added his doc, many different illnesses can cause the same symptoms as ADC.

To confirm an ADC diagnosis, doctors can administer a battery of different tests. Additionally, effective anti-HIV drugs can address the underlying cause of ADC. Plus, treatments can help manage its symptoms.

After hearing this, Watson said to his doctor, "Thanks. I'll definitely remember what you said."

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