A Matter of Time

Another reason to know your status: Among those who start antiretroviral medications right after getting HIV, more report cures and remissions.

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This year, when a baby girl born to an HIV-positive Mississippi woman triumphed over the virus, people worldwide got excited. Many felt that the aggressive antiretrovirals (ARVs) doctors used to treat the infant led to a “functional” cure of HIV. A functional cure means that although the baby’s body was not completely rid of the virus, HIV was essentially no longer a threat—even after the baby stopped taking meds. Scientists are sure that speedy treatment of the child was key to the virus’s defeat.

In a separate study also released this year, French scientists wrote about 14 people living with HIV who’d started taking ARVs soon after contracting the virus. These patients kept taking meds, on average, about three years. But once they stopped ARV treatment—for as long as four to 9.6 years—they reached what’s called “viral remission.” The immune systems of these men and women were able to control HIV and keep them healthy. In general, scientists estimate that about 15 percent of people who start treatment soon after contracting HIV will be able to reach viral remission.

What’s the takeaway from these studies? The earlier those with HIV are diagnosed and treated, the more likely they can control the virus and stay healthy.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/starting-HIV-meds-24424-5127