Body Eclectic: Lungs

A short-winded take on two conditions that leave HIVers breathless

October 1, 2004 By David Gelman, MD

Pneumonia—“lung infection.” HAART has slashed rates, but **PCP (Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia)** remains the most common opportunistic infection, even in HIVers with CD4 counts above 200. The usual symptom of this fungal pest is shortness of breath. When CD4s dip below 200, most docs start HIVers on Bactrim to prevent PCP. They should also prescribe it if you have thrush (a sign of weakening immunity, making you a potential PCP target). HIVers are also more at risk for bacterial pneumonias like **pneumococcus**. Typical symptoms are high fevers, cough, and pain on breathing deeply. Antibiotics knock the wind out of almost all pneumonias—and most folks feel better as soon as they start taking them.

Lung Cancer—HIVer lung-cancer rates are two to eight times higher than neggies’. The diagnosis is tricky because the symptoms—cough, weight loss, fatigue and shortness of breath—also indicate other HIVer ills. But deep breath: When detected, lung cancers in HIVers don’t seem more advanced than in negative folks. Smoking has always been everybody’s greatest preventable risk, and it’s especially dangerous for illness-prone positive folks. A pack of new tools—from meds to patches to peer support—make kicking butt(s) a bit easier.

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