The Keys to HIV Nonprogressors

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Researchers recently discovered five amino acid keys that explain why some people can control HIV without drugs—and offer hope for those who can't.

Bruce Walker, MD, and other researchers at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston have long been analyzing blood samples of HIV controllers—HIV-positive people who suppress the virus without meds, years after infection. Recently, the researchers identified five amino acids—tiny fragments of an immune system protein called HLA-B—that seem to make this possible.

Walker's group analyzed blood samples from HIV controllers (with viral loads below 2,000) and elite controllers (undetectable). The new information, says Florencia Pereyra, MD, of the research group, "identifies the exact [part of] the HLA molecule and the exact amino acid that makes that molecule protective" against HIV progression. This could help researchers develop a therapeutic vaccine to mimic controllers' HLA-B proteins, putting all HIV-positive people in control—without meds.

If you think you are a controller and you want to participate in the research, call 617.643.2368, 617.643.3643 or 617.643.8678, or e-mail ragonclinicalresearch@partners.org.

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