Altering Cells Might Boost HIV Control

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For the first time, research has shown that engineering stem cells to form HIV-targeting immune cells helps suppress the virus in living tissues—albeit, for now, in a “humanized” mouse model.

The experiment focused on an immune cell that kills HIV but doesn’t exist in large enough numbers to stop the virus from spreading. The study showed that other cells, when altered to mimic the killer cells, could repopulate the immune systems of mice sufficiently to slow viral spread. Many steps remain before the technique can be tested or applied in humans, but its potential is exciting. Researcher Jerome Zack, PhD, of UCLA’s Center for AIDS Research, says,

“Replacing the need for HIV meds would be a home run. But even lowering viral loads to slow HIV’s progress so people could take fewer drugs would help.”

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