HIV May Be Linked to Fatigue in Older People

A recent small study compared objective and subjective fatigue among those with and without HIV who were age 50 and older.

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People with HIV may have higher levels of fatigue as they get older compared with their HIV-negative counterparts, the National AIDS Treatment Advocacy Project (NATAP) reports. This is according to baseline data drawn from a small study that will investigate whether an exercise regimen affects fatigue among HIV-positive and HIV-negative individuals age 50 and older.

Presenting their findings at the 8th International Workshop on HIV and Aging in New York City, Colorado researchers launched the fatigue study with 36 HIV-positive and 38 HIV-negative individuals. The HIV-positive participants had been taking antiretroviral treatment for at least two years, had a viral load lower than 200 and a CD4 count of at least 200.

The HIV-positive and -negative groups had similar average ages (57.3 years and 59 years), proportions of men (86 percent and 95 percent), proportions of whites (64 percent and 82 percent) and proportions of Blacks (28 percent and 11 percent). Statistically significantly different (meaning the differences were unlikely to have been driven by chance) demographics included average body-mass index, or BMI (27.5 and 29.8), the proportion employed full time (14 percent and 66 percent), the proportion unemployed (19 percent and 3 percent), the proportion of cigarette smokers (39 percent and 13 percent) and the proportion of marijuana users (53 percent and 14 percent).

On a subjective test of fatigue, the participants in the HIV-positive group had a lower score on a commonly used, standardized measure of individual vitality, known as the 36-Item Short-Form Survey (SF-36), compared with those in the HIV-negative group (48.1 compared with 53.6). On an objective test of fatigue, the HIV-positive individuals walked 400 meters (1,312 feet, or almost a quarter mile) in an average of 254.6 seconds, compared with 229.1 seconds among the HIV-negative individuals.

The researchers theorize that the greater apparent fatigue among the HIV-positive group may be a result of the virus serving as an independent risk factor for fatigue.

To read the NATAP report, click here.

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