A Low CD4 Count Despite Low Viral Load Raises Risk of Death

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Those whose CD4 cell levels fail to rise above 200 despite long-term suppression of HIV through antiretroviral (ARV) therapy have a more than doubled risk of death, aidsmap reports. Publishing their findings in Clinical Infectious Diseases, researchers studied 5,550 people with HIV from 53 European and North American cohorts who had CD4 counts at or below 200 before starting HIV treatment and who maintained a viral load at or below 500 for more than three years.

A total of 835 (15 percent) of the study participants did not see their CD4 counts rise above 200 after three years of viral suppression. Factors associated with these persistently low CD4 counts included increased age, being a male heterosexual or an injection drug user, having a viral load below 100,000 or a relatively low CD4 count upon starting treatment, and taking longer after starting ARVs to achieve a suppressed viral load.

There were 175 deaths in the study. Those whose CD4s did not rise above 200 had a mortality rate of 8 percent, compared with just 2 percent among those who did. Adjusting for various factors, the investigators found those who remained below the 200 CD4 count threshold had a 2.6-times greater likelihood of death when compared with those whose CD4 counts rose above that mark.

To read the aidsmap story, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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