People Living With HIV Are at Risk for Heart Disease

Studies suggest that screening people living with HIV for heart disease may improve longevity.

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Should you get heart disease tests along with your CD4 counts? Two studies suggest that screening for both may improve longevity. Data from a study of Austrian people with HIV published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health suggest that high CD4 T-cell counts are linked with longer life and reduced mortality for people with just about all health conditions.

Researchers from the Austrian HIV Cohort Study Group looked at causes of death for people with HIV from 1997 to 2014. Overall, mortality dropped by two thirds, and most of those deaths could be explained by low CD4 counts. But that wasn't the case for people who died of heart conditions, who weren't protected by higher CD4 counts.

Another study of 38,868 Americans living with HIV found evidence that women, people younger than 40 and those of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage had particularly high rates of heart failure compared with their HIV-negative peers.

HIV-negative people were more likely to have many traditional risk factors for heart disease, such as diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure, all of which corresponded with greater use of heart medications. People with HIV, meanwhile, were more likely to have chronic liver disease, cancer and depression and less likely to take heart-protective meds.

After more than three years of follow-up, people with HIV were 68% more likely to have been diagnosed with heart failure. In particular, women, people younger than 40 and Asians and Pacific Islanders were about 2.5 times more likely to have heart failure than their HIV-negative peers.

These findings led study coauthor Alan Go, MD, of Kaiser Permanente Northern California, and colleagues to suggest earlier and better screening of people with HIV for risk factors and signs of heart disease.

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