Only Took Me 23 Years...

September 29, 2008 By Peter Staley

Just got my latest blood work back, and for the first time since testing HIV positive in 1985, my CD4 count broke the 750 mark. 754 to be exact.

Back in my ACT UP days, when I was a complete media whore, there was a running joke that folks could check for my latest CD4 count (we called them T cell counts back then) by reading The New York Times. Now, with this wonder called The Internets, I can post the whole sordid history right here.

So here's a fun graph showing 23 years of CD4 counts, along with my HIV viral load (showed in logs, for easy graphing), which only became available in the mid-90s.

Kind of a wild ride, eh? Here's a list of specific moments where I started or changed therapies:

Diagnosed w/ "AIDS-Related Complex" 11/15/85
11/85 CD4 351 (20%)
03/87 CD4 373 (21%), Start 1200mg AZT, stop 6 months later due to anemia
09/88 CD4 103 (19%), Start 300mg AZT
10/89 CD4 702 (23%)
11/90 CD4 324 (18%), Add 200mg Videx to AZT
03/91 CD4 606 (21%)
01/95 CD4 490 (20%), VL 19,120 (my 1st VL test)
07/96 CD4 300 (16%), VL 15,980, Switch to Crixivan/Zerit/Epivir
10/96 CD4 401 (16%), VL undetectable
01/99 CD4 470 (16%), VL 1,239, Switch to Sustiva/Videx/Epivir
02/00 CD4 671 (28%), VL 885
05/03 CD4 612 (23%), VL 11,599, Stop therapy before switch
06/03 CD4 397 (12%), VL 489,796, Start Reyataz/Norvir/Viramune/Truvada
08/08 CD4 754 (33%), VL undetectable

Note my amazing luck with mono then dual therapy with the nukes (AZT and Videx). Tony Fauci always remarked how amazed he was by the CD4 rises I got from starting both of these meds. Even after being on dual-nuke therapy for six years, my viral load was only around 20,000.

Bottom line, I got very, very lucky, and was able to hold out until HAART’s arrival in ’96. And now I’ve got over 750 CD4s! Was it the Reyataz, or the Lindt Dark Chocolate I take with it every night?

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