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Neurological Complications of AIDS

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

Source

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). *Neurological Complications of AIDS Information Page*.

AIDS is primarily an immune system disorder caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), but it can also affect the nervous system. HIV does not appear to directly invade nerve cells but it jeopardizes their health and function, causing symptoms such as confusion, forgetfulness, behavioral changes, headaches, progressive weakness and loss of sensation in the arms and legs, cognitive motor impairment, or damage to the peripheral nerves. Other complications that can occur as a result of HIV infection or the drugs used to treat it include pain, seizures, shingles, spinal cord problems, lack of coordination, difficult or painful swallowing, anxiety disorder, depression, fever, vision loss, gait disorders, destruction of brain tissue, and coma. Other AIDS-related nervous system disorders may be caused by certain cancers or by illnesses that would not otherwise affect people with healthy immune systems.

Among the most common neurological complications are: AIDS dementia complex, causing symptoms such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), behavioral changes, and a gradual decline in cognitive function; central nervous system lymphomas, cancerous tumors that either begin in the brain or result from a cancer that has spread from another site in the body; cryptococcal meningitis; cytomegalovirus infections; herpes virus infections; neuropathy; neurosyphilis; progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML); and psychological and neuropsychiatric disorders.