

HIV-ASSOCIATED WASTING

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Weight loss is a major problem for HIV-positive people. It not only reduces the quality of life for an individual, but also contributes to a poor prognosis. Weight loss can be of two types. The first type is a major and sudden loss of up to 7 kg in a week, commonly due to secondary infections or diarrhoea. If the infection or diarrhoea can be stopped, the weight loss also tends to stop. The second type of weight loss is more gradual and occurs when there is no evidence of secondary infection or diarrhoea. We are interested in this type of weight loss as malnutrition of this nature is traditionally associated with poor immunity and may lead to more frequent and/or serious bouts of secondary infection. Because we don't know the mechanism(s) of this weight loss, we cannot treat the underlying cause(s) and can only suggest that the patient eats more, without even knowing which foods or supplements would be of greatest benefit under these circumstances.

There are three major possible reasons for weight loss of this nature in HIV-positive people; anorexia, malabsorption or a metabolic abnormality due to the presence of HIV. We are investigating the causes of this wasting and are determining whether the causative factors are present in the asymptomatic phase of HIV-infection.

Data was taken from three groups, heterosexual men without HIV, homosexual men with HIV who were asymptomatic and homosexual men with HIV who had an unexplained weight loss of at least 10%. Data taken included a dietary assessment using the Frequan questionnaire from the CSIRO Division of Human Nutrition, information about dietary influences and the use of medications, dietary supplements and recreational drugs, anthropometric data in the form of a comprehensive set of circumference, skinfold and bioelectrical impedance measurements and over 50 biochemical tests on blood including measurements of various vitamins and minerals. The results, particularly the dietary and biochemical results, will be discussed.

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