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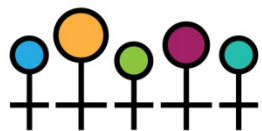
Understanding CD4 Cells and CD4 Cell Tests

Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

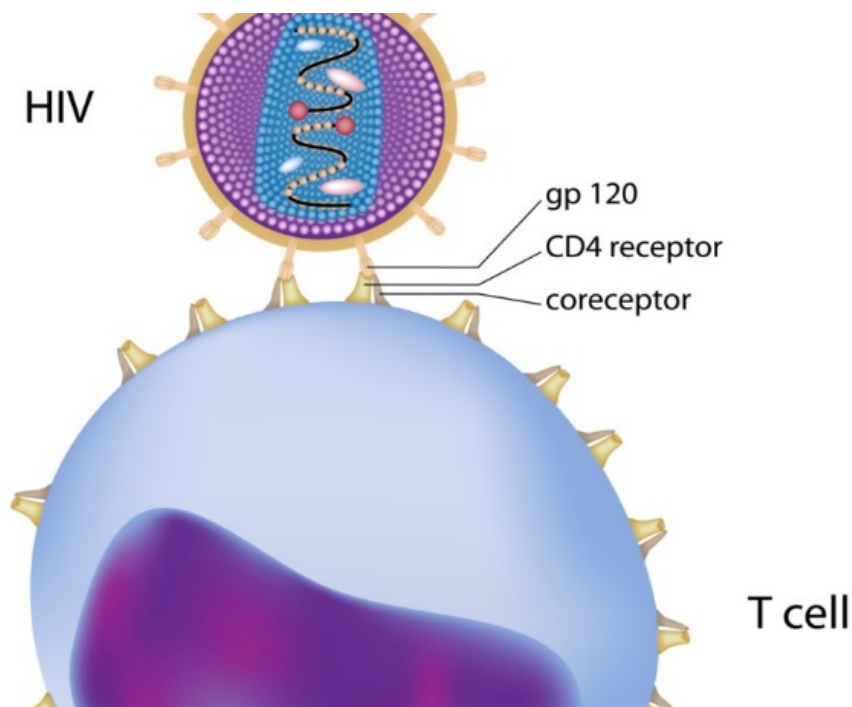
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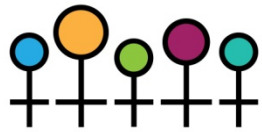


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Understanding CD4 Cells and CD4 Cell Tests

CD4 Cell (or “T Cell”): A type of white blood cell that HIV infects and destroys, weakening the immune system.

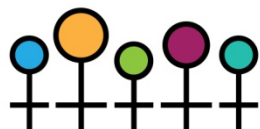




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The Basics

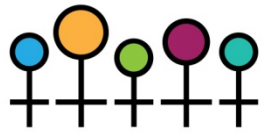
- White blood cells like CD4 cells are an important part of your immune system
- Your immune system protects your body by fighting germs and infections
- As the immune system loses CD4 cells, it becomes less able to fight off germs
 - When people living with HIV lose a lot of CD4 cells, they are at risk of getting AIDS-related cancers and opportunistic infections (OIs) – which can cause serious illness or death



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The Basics

- The number of CD4 cells a person has (their **CD4 count**):
 - Gives a picture of the health of their immune system
 - Usually decreases as HIV disease gets worse
 - Can help your health care provider tell if your HIV is getting worse, and if the treatment you're taking is working well
- A normal CD4 count is about 500 to 1,500
- Without HIV treatment, HIV infects and destroys more and more CD4 cells, and the CD4 count goes down



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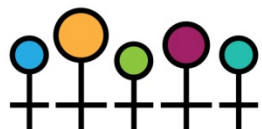
CD4 Count and HIV

CD4 count > 500:

- People with CD4 counts above 500 cells
 - Usually have a fairly normal immune system
 - Are at low risk for OIs

CD4 count < 200:

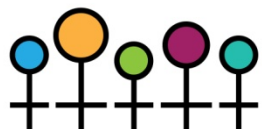
- People with CD4 counts below 200 cells
 - Are diagnosed with AIDS
 - Are at risk for developing serious OIs



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CD4 Count and HIV Treatment

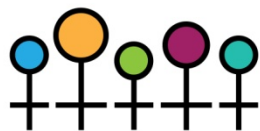
- U.S. treatment guidelines and WHO (international guidelines) now recommend treatment for everyone living with HIV, no matter their CD4 count
- Many people see CD4 counts increase when they start effective HIV treatment, as the drugs slow or stop HIV



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CD4 Count and HIV Treatment

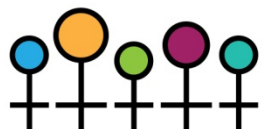
- CD4 counts can go down again if you are unable to take your HIV drugs correctly or if your HIV becomes resistant to the drugs
- Along with your viral load, your CD4 count is a **valuable tool for monitoring your HIV** and how well your HIV drugs are working



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CD4 Cell Test

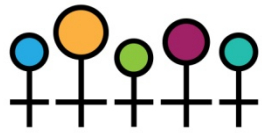
- Simple blood test ordered by your health care provider
- When you first start HIV care, get a "baseline" CD4 cell test
 - Gives a picture of your immune system when you first enter into care
- Get CD4 count checked every 3-6 months – or as often as your health care provider recommends
 - **More frequent CD4 cell tests** may be needed if your count is low/falling, if you are starting or changing treatment
 - Less frequent CD4 cell tests may be needed if you've been on HIV drugs for more than 2 years, are virally suppressed, have CD4 count over 300



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CD4 Cell Test

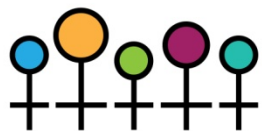
- Many factors can affect your CD4 count, including
 - Time of day
 - Level of stress
 - Your menstrual cycle
 - Infections such as the flu
- If CD4 cell test result surprises you or your health care provider, (s)he will probably a second test
- Try not to worry too much about a single abnormal test result
 - Trends (and percentages) over time are more important



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CD4 Percentage

- Tells what percent of total white blood cells are CD4 cells
 - Normal CD4 cell percentage is about 30 to 60 percent
 - Your health care provider will want to check this number in addition to your CD4 count
- CD4 percentage may be more reliable measurement than CD4 count
 - Tends to change less between measurements
- Treatment guidelines are based on CD4 counts, not CD4 percentage

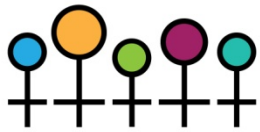


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The Bottom Line

- If you begin treatment when CD4 count and percentage are low (<200), it may take longer for CD4 numbers to increase
 - If viral load is undetectable, you can be encouraged that HIV is not growing or spreading
 - Watching CD4 cells and percentage increase can take time and patience
 - Keeping track of trends in CD4 count can help you and your provider make decisions about starting/changing treatment

Getting regular CD4 cell tests is an important part of taking charge of your health!



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Learn More!

- To learn more about this topic, please read the full fact sheet on this topic:
 - Fact sheet: [Understanding CD4 Cells and CD4 Cell Tests](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
 - [www.thewellproject.org](#)
 - [www.facebook.com/thewellproject](#)
 - [www.twitter.com/thewellproject](#)