

HIV and the immune system / NAM.

Contributors

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the basics

HIV and the immune system



The immune system is the body's natural defence system. It's a network of cells, tissues and organs inside the body.



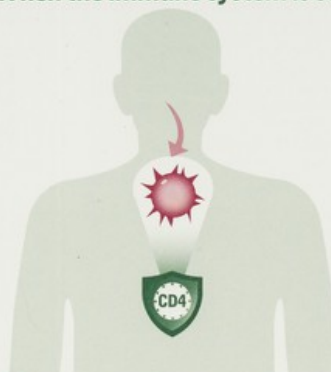
'Pathogens' (or germs) are living things that can cause disease. Bacteria and viruses are both pathogens. We come into contact with them all the time – there are pathogens in the air we breathe, in the food we eat and elsewhere in our surroundings.



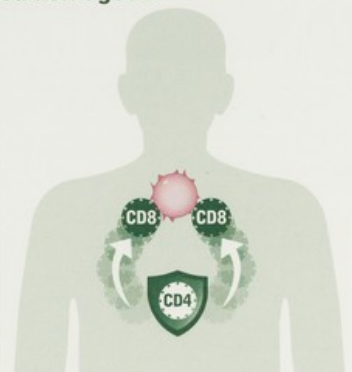
But pathogens don't usually cause problems, because the immune system attacks them if they get inside the body.



When the immune system is strong, you don't get ill

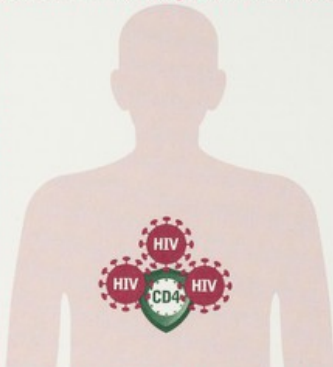


● Once a pathogen has got inside the body, cells in the immune system (called CD4 cells) recognise it as something that doesn't belong there.



● Other immune system cells (including CD8 cells) are sent to attack and destroy the pathogen.

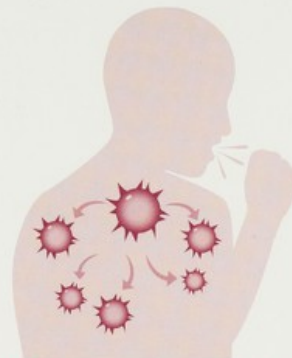
If the immune system has been made weak by HIV, you may get ill



● HIV has infected and taken over lots of your immune system's CD4 cells.



● When another pathogen gets inside the body, the immune system doesn't know how to fight it.



● The pathogen can multiply in the body and make you sick.

Important points

- The immune system is the body's defence system, which recognises and fights off pathogens (germs).
- HIV weakens the immune system, which means that common pathogens can cause infections and illnesses.
- HIV treatment strengthens the immune system.

Notes

A large rectangular area enclosed by a dotted green border, containing seven horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

Want to find out more?

For more information on this topic:

- read NAM's fact sheet 'Immune system cells'
- read Terrence Higgins Trust's booklet 'Your Treatment', or
- speak to an adviser at THT Direct (phone: 0845 12 21 200).

For more information about HIV, NAM provides free fact sheets, information booklets, e-mail bulletins, a monthly newsletter, a comprehensive website (aidsmap.com) and a website specifically for people living with HIV (namlife.org).

Contact us by calling 020 7840 0050 or by sending an e-mail to info@nam.org.uk

Has this resource been useful to you? Please let us know what you think by visiting www.aidsmap.com/feedback, by phoning us or by sending an e-mail. Your feedback helps us to improve the services we offer you.

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