



Health Concerns

CMV Retinitis

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What is CMV Retinitis?

- CMV Retinitis is a serious eye infection that can cause blindness. It is caused by a virus called CMV (Cytomegalovirus).
- HIV positive people with CD4 count below 50 are at increased risk of developing this condition.

How does one get CMV?

- CMV is a very common germ. Most people have been exposed to it at sometime in their lives. Usually it does not cause disease in people with healthy immune systems. In people with very weak immune systems, such as people with organ transplants, on chemotherapy for cancer, or with AIDS, CMV can cause serious illnesses.

What are the symptoms of CMV?

- CMV can infect different parts of the body, including your eyes, lungs, stomach and bowels, and the brain. The symptoms can vary, but the most common place in the body that CMV infects is the eyes.
- With CMV Retinitis, the retina of the eye is infected by CMV. The symptoms can include blurred vision, blind spots and “floaters” (dark patches that seem to move around in your eyes’ visual fields). It is usually not painful but can get worse quickly and eventually cause blindness. It is very important to report any changes in your vision to your doctor right away so that you can start treatment early.

How can I prevent CMV retinitis?

- Since CMV usually affects people with very weak immune system (CD4 below 50), the best way to prevent CMV is therefore to stay healthy and keep your CD4 cells at a higher level.
- HIV medications can help you maintain the health of your immune system and keep your CD4 count high.
- Regular check ups with your family doctor or an eye specialist can help discover CMV retinitis early.

How can CMV retinitis be treated?

- Treatments for CMV retinitis are usually given either by injection of the medication through a vein (IV) or directly into the infected eye(s).
- The medications used to treat CMV include:
 - ganciclovir (Cytovene) and valganciclovir (Valcyte)
 - foscarnet (Foscavir)
 - cidofovir
- The medications do not kill the CMV virus, but they slow down the spread of CMV in



your body. Treatments usually need to be taken for life. With the intravenous medications, people usually get a permanent intravenous line in their body for getting the medication every day. Sometimes people can take the oral form of ganciclovir or valganciclovir tablets for maintenance therapy after the infection stabilizes.

- With the recent advance in HIV treatments, some people have major improvements in their CD4 counts and their general health and may be able to stop taking treatments for CMV at some point. Talk with your doctor about this possibility.

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