

GMHC'S Nutrition & Wellness Program

BODY CHANGES AND HIV

WHAT IS LIPODYSTROPHY?

Lipodystrophy or “Lipo” for short, refers to body shape changes that sometimes happen with HIV. If you have lipodystrophy, you may notice that you have *gained* fat, especially in the belly, back of neck, or both.

WHAT IS LIPOATROPHY?

Fat *loss* with HIV is sometimes called “lipoatrophy”. With lipoatrophy, you may experience a loss of fat in the face, arms or legs. This is sometimes referred to as “wasting” but it is not caused by a loss of muscle; it is fat which is lost.

You may also experience changes in the way your body deals with cholesterol, fat or sugar so it's important to keep track of how your body is changing and discuss it with your health care provider.

WHERE CAN YOU SEE SYMPTOMS OF FAT ACCUMULATION?

- in the belly
- behind the neck (also called buffalo hump or dorso-cervical fat pad)
- in small lumps under the skin (called lipomas)
- around the chin (sometimes called a horse collar)
- in the breasts of both men and women

WHERE CAN YOU SEE SYMPTOMS OF FAT LOSS?

- the arms and legs
- in the face (which may lead to the look of hollow temples or sunken cheeks)

WHAT CAUSES LIPO?

Researchers still don't know exactly what causes body shape changes with HIV. Researchers think these changes are probably related to:

- the use of some medications
- the amount of time you have been taking antiretroviral drugs
- older age
- body mass index (BMI) or changes in BMI. (BMI is a ratio of your height to your weight)
- duration of HIV infection
- immune function and T cell count
- gender (women are more likely to accumulate fat whereas men are more likely to lose fat)

WHAT PROBLEMS ARE LINKED WITH BODY CHANGES?

- **Metabolic Changes:** some people with lipo also develop high levels of cholesterol, triglycerides (fat) or glucose (sugar) in their blood. You can also develop damage to the mitochondria in your cells (that's the part of the cell that helps your body make energy).
- **Emotional Changes:** changes in body shape can be understandably distressing. If you have changes, you may experience anxiety, stress or a change in the way you feel about your body.

An important note: Even if you are having metabolic or emotional symptoms, these changes do *not* mean that you are in immediate danger of serious illness. Always talk to your health care professional if you are concerned.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

- Adopting a healthy diet and lifestyle is key to dealing with body changes. That means taking care of your diet and making sure that you get enough physical activity.
- Having emotional support to deal with lifestyle changes, and body changes are important too.
- Some people have tried various cosmetic surgery procedures such as liposuction or cheek implants to deal with body changes. Unfortunately, these procedures can be very expensive, have health risks and the results may only be temporary.
- Your doctor might suggest medication to help deal with increased cholesterol, fat or sugar in your blood.
- Staying physically active is very important for maintaining lean body mass (muscle). Exercise can also help you lose fat, maintain bone strength and contribute to your overall health. Both aerobic and strength training exercises are vital to your health.

NUTRITIONAL GOALS

- **Eat less fatty foods:** Choose leaner meats, including fish and poultry more often. Choose low fat or fat-free dairy products. Avoid highly processed snack foods that are loaded with fat and salt.
- **Load up on fruits and vegetables:** Aim for at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day to help boost your immune system and to provide lots of nutrients and fiber.
- **Go for fiber:** Choose whole grain breads and cereals, brown rice, beans and other high fiber foods.
- **Get up and move:** Both aerobic and strength building activities are vital for good health and can help manage the symptoms of body changes.

SO WHAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE?

- Talk to your health care provider about lipodystrophy, lipoatrophy or any changes in body weight, body shape or symptoms that you are having.
- Your best bet is to eat a diet low in fat and high in nutrients and fiber.
- Maintain a reasonable body weight and try to increase your physical activity to maintain your body's muscles and to stay strong.