

The Brain Infection **TOXO** How to Help Yourself

Toxo: What You Can Do



People with HIV are at special risk for toxo, a serious infection that often affects the brain. This booklet explains what toxo is. It also lists steps you can take to prevent and fight toxo. Taking these steps can help you stay well longer.

What Is Toxo?

Toxo is short for toxoplasmosis, the medical term for this disease. In people with HIV, toxo can be very serious.

The cause of toxo is a germ that many people already have in their bodies. It is harmless - unless you have HIV or some other disease that weakens the immune system. Without a strong immune system to protect you, toxo can cause severe illness.

People with this disease may have some or all of the problems listed below.

Symptoms of Toxo

- Headache
- Weakness
- Hard to think clearly
- Fever
- Numbness
- Coma
- Seizures
- Other nerve problems



Toxo Can Be Treated

Medicines can help against toxo in two ways:

- **By keeping your immune system stronger.** Some medicines can help the body's defenses fight disease for a longer time. To keep you healthy, your doctor may ask you to start taking medicine as soon as you find out you have HIV.
- **By treating the infection.** Today's drugs can't cure toxo, but they can often make it better. Once you get sick with toxo, you may need to continue to take medicine to keep toxo from making you sick again.



How To Help Yourself



1. **Get regular check-ups.** A blood test can show if you have ever been infected with the toxo germ.
2. **Tell your doctor or clinic nurse if you notice any symptoms of toxo.** These warning signs can alert the doctor that you may have toxo. The faster you get care, the better.



3. **Keep your immune system as strong as you can. This means eating healthy foods, getting enough rest and**

**exercise,
and
staying
away
from
alcohol,
cigarettes
and
drugs.
Your
doctor
may
want
you
to
take
medicine
even
if
you
feel
well.**

- 4. Stay away from common sources of toxo. If you have never been infected with the toxo germ, you must be careful to avoid it. Two major sources of toxo are cat litter and raw or undercooked meat. To keep from getting the toxo germ:**



- **Since cats are sometimes infected with toxo, stay away from cat litter or cat waste. Ask someone else to clean after the cat. If you clean the litter box, wear gloves and a mask.**

- Cook all meats (and chicken or turkey) and eggs until well done.

5. Follow your care plan. You will need to take the medicines your doctor prescribes at the right times, in the right amounts and for as long as they tell you. Be sure you know what to do, and stick with the routine. If you have questions, don't be afraid to ask the doctor or clinic staff.



6. Report any new problems that occur while you are taking medicines for toxo. Your medicines may

cause
side
effects.
Sometimes
changing
the
amount
or
type
of
medicine
can
help.



Research: Hope for the Future



Scientists are looking for better drugs against toxo. Today, new drugs are being tested that might work better than current medicines in treating and preventing the disease.

You may be able to help test one of these new drugs. If the new drug works, you may help yourself -- and others with HIV.

If you are interested, talk to your doctor or clinic nurse. Or call the numbers on the next page to find out more.

Remember:

- Be sure to have regular check-ups.
- To keep from getting the toxo germ, stay away from cat litter and cook all meats and eggs until well-done.
- If you have any symptoms of toxo, call your doctor or clinic right away.
- Take your medicine as directed.

To Find Out More About Toxo

Here are some numbers to call to learn more about toxo and how to help yourself.

- **1-800-342-AIDS**
(1-800-342-2437)

You can get more details about toxo. You can also find out about treatment centers and other help.

- **1-800-TRIALS-A**
(1-800-874-2572)

You can find out about testing new drugs for toxo -- which drugs are being tested, where the studies are taking place, and who is doing the research.

- **1-800-AIDS-NIH**
(1-800-243-7644)

Call Monday through Friday from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (Eastern Time) to find out about studies being done at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Clinical Center.

