Toxoplasmosis (AIDS &)

Toxoplasmosis is a serious illness that is caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondi*. Infection most often comes from the feces of infected cats. It can also come from the ingestion of poorly cooked meat, contaminated food by insects, contact with infected insects or soil. Infected cat feces may remain infectious in the soil for over one year. House cats living on cat food are usually not infectious; cats who hunt for their food can be. Infections that do not cause symptoms are common.

HUMAN INFECTION OCCURS FROM:

- Eating infected food.
- Handling infected cat waste.
- Organ transplantation and blood transfusion from someone with the disease.
- Passage of the infection from a mother to a newborn.

The most common illness caused is an infection of the brain (*encephalitis*) which can lead to coma and death. The risks for this are higher if your CD4 counts are below 100.

SYMPTOMS

Usually there are no identifiable symptoms. However, following an incubation period of 5 to 18 days, there may be:

- Fever.
- Confusion.
- Seizures.
- Swollen lymph glands.
- Muscle aches.
- Night sweats.
- Enlarged spleen in 10 to 20% of people.

DIAGNOSIS

- A blood test can be used to test for antibodies to *Toxoplasma gondii*. This tests shows if you have been exposed to toxo. A negative antibody test means that you are not infected. A positive test <u>does not mean</u> you have an infection of your brain.
- Brain scans (specialized x-rays) using computerized tomography (CT scan) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI scan) may also be used to diagnose this illness.

TREATMENT

- The toxoplasma parasite needs vitamin B to live. There are medications which your caregiver can prescribe which keep this parasite from getting vitamin B.
- Because these medications can also cause *anemia* (less red blood cells), people usually take Leucovorin, a form of folic acid (a B vitamin), to prevent this.
- Most people will improve in a couple weeks with early diagnosis and treatment.

PREVENTION

- The best way to prevent toxo when you have HIV infection is to take your medications.
- Cook all meat thoroughly.
- Keep house cats indoors. Feed them only store bought foods.
- Avoid outdoor cats.
- Wear gloves and a face mask and wash thoroughly if you clean a cat box.

- Your caregiver may prescribe medications to prevent infection if you CD4 count is thought to be too low.
- A T-cell count over 100 should prevent toxoplasmosis from causing health problems. If your T-cell count falls below 100, talk with your caregiver about taking drugs to prevent toxo.
- Take all medications as directed.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Follow the recommendations in prevention.
- **Do not** take in stray cats before having them checked for toxoplasmosis.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You think you may have contracted toxoplasmosis.
- You came in contact with a stray cat.
- You have a cat and think it may have toxoplasmosis.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop a fever of 100º F (37.8º C) or higher.
- You have or came in contact with a cat and you develop any of the symptoms listed above.

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