

Kaposi Sarcoma: Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)



What is antiretroviral therapy (ART)?

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is the use of medicines to control infections with certain types of viruses, called retroviruses. This treatment is important if you are infected with the HIV. HIV is the retrovirus that causes AIDS. Treatment with highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) can often keep HIV under control. This helps keep your immune system strong. It can lower your risk for other kinds of infection.

When might ART be used in people with Kaposi sarcoma?

If you are HIV-positive and have AIDS-related Kaposi sarcoma (KS), it's important to treat the HIV infection and keep it under control. KS is caused by infection with a virus called human herpes virus 8. It's also called the Kaposi sarcoma-associated herpes virus (KSHV).

Having a weakened immune system because of uncontrolled HIV infection can allow KSHV to grow. This can lead to KS. Still, many people with KSHV don't develop KS. But keeping HIV infection under control (and your immune system strong) can help keep KSHV under control, too.

In people with KS, HAART can often cause KS lesions to shrink or not get worse, even without any other treatments. Also, KS lesions tend to get worse if you have an active infection. HAART can help strengthen your immune system. This can help keep you from getting another virus or bacterial infection that could allow the KS to get worse.

If you have advanced KS, HAART may be used along with chemotherapy.

How is ART given?

HAART is given as a combination of medicines. They're taken as pills every day. Many different combinations of medicines are used.

Working with your healthcare provider

HAART can sometimes cause side effects. The medicines may also interact with any other medicines you're taking. Make sure your healthcare providers know all of the medicines, vitamins, herbs, and supplements you're taking. Write down the names of your medicines. Ask your healthcare team how they work, when you should take them, and what side effects they might cause.

Talk with your healthcare providers about what symptoms to watch for and when to call them. Make sure you know what number to call with questions. Ask if there's a different number for evenings and weekends.

It may be helpful to keep a diary of your side effects. A written list will make it easier for you to remember your questions when you go to your appointments. It will also make it easier for you to work with your healthcare team to make a plan to manage your side effects.

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