Being HIV-positive puts you **A compromised immune**

**system increases one’s**

**vulnerability to certain**

**cancers, the most one**

**common being caused**

**by the Kaposi sarcoma**

**herpes virus**

**BY DR TOROOTI MWIRIGI**

nation@askadoc.co.ke People with HIV are highly

vulnerable to various health

conditions, which are often

life-threatening, due to their

severely weakened immune system.

Such people are at great risk of

developing some types of cancers as

part of the Aids-defining conditions.

This means that if a person with HIV

develops one of these cancers, there is

a possibility that he/she could develop

full-blown Aids. The association

between these cancers and HIV/Aids

possibly depends on the person’s

weakened immune system.

In addition, people who are infected

with a type of virus known as the

Kaposi sarcoma herpes virus and

are HIV-positive are at a greater

risk of developing Kaposi sarcoma

cancer. These cancers usually begin

when a person’s normal cells start

to change, and eventually grow

uncontrollably, thus forming a

mass known as a tumor. A tumor

can be either benign, meaning it is

non-cancerous, or malignant, which

means it is cancerous and can spread

to other parts of the body. The most

common cancer associated with

HIV/Aids is Kaposi sarcoma. Others

may include cancers of the cervix,

mouth, lungs, Hodgkin’s disease

and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

Kaposi Sarcoma (KS)

This is a type of skin cancer that

causes patches of abnormal tissue

to grow on the skin, in the lining of

the throat, nose and mouth or other

organs. It is caused by the herpes

virus known as Human Herpes Virus

8 (HHV-8), and affects more men

than women.The difference between

Kaposi sarcoma and other cancers is

that, whereas most cancers start in

one area and then spread, the lesions

in Kaposi sarcoma can start in more

than one area of the body at the same

time. Even in cases where only one

skin lesion is visible, most people will

have already developed lesions that

are too small to be noticed in other

areas of the body. The patches are

red or purple and are made of blood

cells and cancer cells. These red or

purple patches often do not have any

symptoms but may be painful. If the

cancer spreads to the lungs or the

digestive system, bleeding can result.

A person can experience difficulty in

breathing if he or she has lung tumors.

Lesions that appear in the groin area

and legs may cause painful swellings

on the feet and legs.

Types of Kaposi sarcoma

The types of Kaposi sarcoma are

defined by the different populations

in which they develop. However, the

changes within the Kaposi sarcoma

cells are same.

Epidemic or AIDS-related

This is the most common type of

KS and it develops in people who

are HIV positive. The HIV virus

damages the immune system, making

a person vulnerable to infections

and complications such as Kaposi

sarcoma.

Classic or Mediterranean

This type is more common in older

people and affects more women than

men. The lesions in this type of Kaposi

sarcoma do not grow fast and new

lesions take time to develop. The

immune system in this case is not

as weak as that of epidemic KS, but

old age naturally weakens it.

Endemic or African

It is common in Africa and affects

people under 40 years. On very

rare occasions, an aggressive type

of Kaposi sarcoma may occur in

children before they reach puberty.

It progresses very fast and usually

affects the lymph nodes and other

body organs.

Iatrogenic or transplant-related Kaposi

sarcoma

This type occurs as a result of a

suppressed immune system after an

organ transplant. The drugs used to

avoid rejection of the new organ by the

immune system weaken it, so a person

with the Kaposi sarcoma herpes virus

develops the disease.

Symptoms

The most noticeable signs of Kaposi

sarcoma are the lesions that appear

on the skin that might not be lifethreatening.

These lesions have the

following characteristics;

They are flat, painless, non-itchy

and do not drain.

They appear as purple or red spots

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**Nutrition For Cancer Patients**

A person with cancer requires a

diet that provides the body with

all the key nutrients necessary for

strengthening the immune system.

This might require consuming

twice the number of calories than

usual to help maintain normal

body weight.

It is recommended that cancer

patients get weighed daily to

determine whether they are

consuming enough calories. Due

to decreased appetite, the patient

should take regular meals in small

quantities.

Thrush and mouth sores might

make eating uncomfortable, so it

is advisable to give bland food is

advisable to avoid this.

**Tips on increasing calorie intake:**

Drink whole milk rather than

low-fat milk

Add cheese to your sandwiches,

eggs and vegetables

Increase your daily intake of

snacks to two to three times a day

Eat fatty fish like salmon two or

three times in a week

Add sugar, honey, milk, oil and

margarine to your meals

Snack on hard-boiled eggs, nuts,

cheese and hard candies

Spread margarine and peanut

butter on toast and waffles

Add slices of avocado to your

salad or sandwich

The overall health of the patient

can be improved by giving the

patient the support required as

well as taking every precaution

at home. This can be done by

ensuring that the the patient

takes their medication exactly

as prescribed and also being

aware of the possible side effects.

Also, have painkillers such as

Acetaminophen and Ibuprofen

at home. Learn more about the

condition and how to manage the

symptoms. It is also advisable that

the patient join a support group

to share his or her experience with

others suffering from the disease.

Organisations such as the Africa

Cancer Association help cancer

patients cope with the disease.