Gonorrhea: It’s nothing to “clap” about!
By Shelda Martin, MD, AAHIVS, FACP

What is gonorrhea?
Gonorrhea (gon-uh-ree-uh) is an infection caused by a germ that you can get through having sex. This bacterium, or germ, likes to grow in warm, moist areas so it can be found in the cervix, uterus and fallopian tubes in women, the urethra in men, and both the mouth, throat, anus and eyes. It is spread by having contact with someone who has an infection in these areas. If you have unprotected sex, you may get it through semen or vaginal fluid. Ejaculation does not have to occur for you to be infected. If you touch an infected sex organ (like the vagina or penis) and then touch your eyes, you may get an eye infection. If you have oral sex with an infected organ you can get a throat infection. Gonorrhea cannot be passed by sitting on a toilet seat, drinking from a water fountain or shaking hands. Babies can get it from their mothers during birth if they have a vaginal delivery.

What are the symptoms?
Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that can affect anyone who is sexually active. If you have gonorrhea, but treatment is becoming more difficult because some strains are now drug resistant; therefore, we have to use different antibiotics than in the past. Because most people with gonorrhea also have chlamydia (another sexually transmitted infection), most people are treated for this at the same time.

The surest way to avoid gonorrhea is to not have sex. This is clearly not a choice for most adults. Other options include having a long-term relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be negative or wearing Latex condoms correctly each time you have sex.

To protect yourself -
■ Talk with your partner(s) about sexually transmitted diseases and using condoms. If you are having sex with a new partner, know what you are getting yourself into. Remember, it’s YOUR body! It is up to you to make sure you are protected.
■ Don’t be embarrassed to talk to your doctor about this. Tell him/her about any sores or discharge in your genital or rectal areas.
■ Have regular genital/rectal exams. I know it’s not fun or what you want to do, but it can save your life.
■ If you become pregnant, make sure you get tested.

What is the treatment?
You need to talk to your doctor if you or your partner has any symptoms of gonorrhea. Several tests are now available and easy to do, using either a swab of the infected area or a simple urine test. Antibiotics are the cure for gonorrhea, but treatment is becoming more difficult because some strains are now drug resistant; therefore, we have to use different antibiotics than in the past. Because most people with gonorrhea also have chlamydia (another sexually transmitted infection), most people are treated for this at the same time.

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Martin is the Medical Director of the CAMC Ryan White Program

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Visit our website at http://www.camcrwp.org. You’ll find information about HIV symptoms and testing, links to other great HIV-related sites, answers to frequently asked questions, profiles of staff and more.

Welcome Dr. Christy Treadway and Kristina Childers, MSN, APRN-BC

We are pleased to announce that two behavioral health specialists have joined the CAMC Ryan White Program care team. They are Dr. Christy Treadway, an internal medicine/psychiatry physician and Kristina Childers, a nurse practitioner with psychiatry experience. They will be providing four clinics each month for current Ryan White patients who are referred for psychiatry services. The clinics are located in the Outpatient Care Center at CAMC Memorial Hospital in Charleston.

What Is Fatigue?
Fatigue is tiredness that does not go away when you rest. It can be physical or psychological. With physical fatigue, your muscles cannot do things as easily as they used to. You might notice this when you climb stairs or carry bags of groceries. With psychological fatigue, it may be difficult to concentrate for as long as you used to. In severe cases, you might not feel like getting out of bed in the morning and doing your regular daily activities.

Is fatigue important?
Fatigue is one of two main ways the body warns you about a problem. The other warning is pain. Most of us pay attention to pain, and stop whatever causes it. Because fatigue progresses slowly, we don’t pay as much attention until our symptoms are severe.

People with HIV and fatigue tend to get sicker faster than people without fatigue. Also, ongoing fatigue can weaken the immune system. People with HIV should find out what is causing their fatigue and treat it.

How do I know if I have fatigue? Fatigue can start and increase very slowly. If you feel tired even after you rest, talk with your health care provider. This will make it easier to know if you are fatigued, and what might be causing it. The following questions are good to think about before you talk to your health care provider:

■ How long have you been tired?
■ Compared to a few months ago, how has your activity level changed?
■ How do you feel when you are tired? Are you short of breath? Are your muscles sore? Is it difficult to concentrate or remember? Is it hard to get interested in your daily activities?
■ When are you tired? Is it after certain activities, like climbing stairs? Do you wake up tired?

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- Are you sleeping well? How long do you sleep each night? How many times do you get up? It is hard to fall asleep or stay asleep because of itching, pain or other problems?

What causes fatigue, and how is it treated?
Fatigue can be caused by many different factors.

- **Active HIV infection.** When HIV multiplies rapidly, your body uses a lot of energy trying to fight it. Most people have more energy after they start taking antiretroviral (ARV) medications.

- **Other active infections.** Other infections you can get without obvious symptoms. Parasites in your digestive system, bronchitis and other infections or allergies can cause fatigue. If these infections are treated, your energy should improve.

- **Poor nutrition.** People with HIV need more energy than healthy people. If you are not getting enough nutrition, your energy level will be low. Diarrhea can rob your body of nutrients and cause fatigue. If possible, meet with a dietician who knows about HIV to help you to discuss your eating habits. For some people, vitamin B12 supplements or better nutrition can eliminate fatigue.

- **Anemia.** The main job of red blood cells is to carry oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. If you don’t have enough red blood cells, or if they aren’t carrying enough oxygen, your fatigue may be caused by anemia. A simple blood test will show whether you have anemia.

  - If you are anemic, your health care provider will determine the cause. It could be a blood loss, damage to your bone marrow caused by anti-HIV medications or vitamin deficiencies, or by a low level of the hormone erythropoietin, which helps make red blood cells.

- **Low hormone levels.** Especially in men, low levels of the sex hormone testosterone can cause fatigue and lack of interest in sex and other normal activities. Low levels of other important hormones such as DHEA, cortisol or thyroid can cause similar problems. Hormone levels can be checked in blood tests. Pills, patches, creams or injections can restore hormone levels to normal.

- **Depression.** This is more than just feeling sad. Chemical changes in the brain can cause fatigue and a lack of interest in daily activities. There is no blood test for depression. The changes that you are depressed are higher if you have previously been diagnosed with depression, if you have a history of heavy alcohol or recreational drug use or if you have a family history of emotional disorders. Depression can be treated with medications. However, some antidepressants can cause problems with sexual functioning. Also, some antidepressants interact with other ARVs, so they must be used very carefully.

- **Lifestyle.** Getting enough sleep is important. Habits like smoking or drinking coffee can make it harder to sleep. Regular exercise can help.

**The bottom line**
Fatigue is a very common condition for people with HIV. Left untreated, it can make HIV disease progress faster. It can be very difficult to figure out the cause of fatigue. Several factors can cause the same symptoms. Blood tests can identify some causes but not others. The more information you can give your health care provider, the easier it will be to determine what is causing your fatigue and how to treat it.

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Mini relaxation exercises are focused breathing techniques that help reduce anxiety and tension. First, relax your stomach muscles. You should feel your stomach rising as you breathe in, and falling as you breathe out.

**Now, try one of the following:**
1. Count slowly to yourself from 10 to 1 with a different number for each number you say. With the first breath, you say “ten,” with the next breath, you say “nine,” etc. Repeat.
2. If you inhale, count slowly up to four; as you exhale, count slowly back down to one. Repeat.
3. After each inhalation, pause for a few seconds, after your exhale, pause again for a few seconds again.

**Good times to do a “mini”**
While stuck in traffic... while waiting in line... when in pain... etc. etc.etc. etc. etc.

**Suggestion Box**

**What you need to know about MRSA**

By Chris Stiltner, PharmD

**Staphylococcus aureus.** (S. aureus) is as old as mankind and one of the most common bacteria found on our skin. About one fourth of the population has S. aureus and most don’t know it. In the majority of cases, the bacterium is harmless and causes no symptoms. If infection does develop, it is usually minor.

One type of S. aureus has become a major topic. Its name is methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, better known as MRSA (mur-suh). Although MRSA has been the focus of media attention lately, it isn’t a new problem. MRSA has been around since the 1960s.

Methicillin is known as a beta-lactam antibiotic, which is penicillin based. Over time, bacteria have found ways to evade antibiotics such as amoxicillin (Amoxil®) and cephalaxin (Keflex®). This immunity narrows the choices of antibiotics that will treat a MRSA infection, but there are still many medicines that work well.

MRSA can generally be divided into two different types of infections. The first is Commonly Acquired Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (CA-MRSA). The second is the Healthcare-Associated Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (HA-MRSA). HA-MRSA is typically more resistant than the CA-MRSA and is known for causing serious blood infections, pneumonia, and surgical wound infections. People with weakened immune systems stand an even greater risk of becoming infected with HA-MRSA. While HA-MRSA usually requires intravenous (IV) antibiotics and a lengthy hospital stay, CA-MRSA can be usually treated at home with oral medications. Although easier to treat, CA-MRSA can cause painful skin infections similar to pimples and boils.

Drugs that are typically used to treat MRSA include oral medications such as vancomycin, daptomycin (Cubicin®), and tigecycline (Tigacly®). CA-MRSA infections can be treated with oral medications of the same type, such as Bactrim®, clindamycin, minocycline and linezolid (Zyvox®). Often, CA-MRSA may not require any antibiotics. Most infections in people who need medicines only to lance a boil and drain out the infection. It is important to take medication as instructed and also to finish the entire prescription to ensure that the infection will heal.

Roughly one percent of the population has MRSA, but usually never become infected. They are called carriers. Those who do develop infections and those who have recurring bouts may need to be treated. MRSA likes to live on the areas of your skin that are cool and moist, such as the inside of your nose, ears, and maybe other folds in your skin. Your doctor may prescribe Bactroban® ointment to apply to the affected area along with chlorhexidine, an antiseptic cleanser.

Certain groups, including athletes, military recruits, children, Pacific Islanders, Alaskan Natives, men who have sex with men, and prisoners are more likely to become infected with CA-MRSA. Other risk factors include skin-to-skin contact, open cuts or scrapes, close contact with contaminated objects, crowded living conditions and poor hygiene. The old saying “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” applies to both types of MRSA infections. Basic hygiene practices will help reduce your risk of infection. This applies to MRSA and other illnesses as well, such as the flu. Always wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, cover any cuts or scrapes with a clean bandage, avoid contact with others’ wounds or bandages, and avoid sharing items such as towels and razors. Following these few simple steps can greatly reduce your risk of developing a MRSA infection.

Stiltner is a pharmacy practice resident at Charleston Area Medical Center.

**Take the test!**

The decision to be tested for HIV is the first step in taking responsibility for yourself and the health of others with whom you may be intimately involved.

**HIV testing locations**

Many testing sites offer free testing, but some charge a fee. Some locations require an appointment; others accept walk-ins. Call ahead to be sure!

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By phone, you may call:

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  • If you are anemic, your health care provider will determine the cause. It could be blood loss, damage to your bone marrow caused by anti-HIV medications or vitamin deficiencies, or by a low level of the hormone erythropoietin, which helps make red blood cells.
  • Low hormone levels. Especially in men, low levels of the sex hormone testosterone can cause fatigue and lack of interest in sex and other normal activities. Low levels of other important hormones such as DHEA, cortisol or thyroid can cause similar problems. Hormone levels can be checked in blood tests. Pills, patches, creams or injections can restore hormone levels to normal.
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While stuck in traffic...while waiting in your doctor’s office...when someone says something that bothers you...at a red light... when waiting for a phone call...when you feel overwhelmed...while standing in line...when in pain... etc. etc.

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SUGGESTION BOX

This newsletter is a quarterly publication of the CAMC Ryan White Program. It is intended to provide helpful information to individuals in southern West Virginia who are affected and/or infected by HIV/AIDS.

We welcome your comments, suggestions and ideas or topics for articles. Contact Pam LeRose, outreach coordinator, at (304) 388-9979 or by E-mail at pamela.k.reese@camc.org to share your suggestions or to request future issues of path.

To find out more about the CAMC Ryan White Program in southern West Virginia, or to schedule an appointment, call toll-free 1-877-565-4423.

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