

Being Alive

## UNDERSTANDING MAC INFECTION: Introduction

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Microorganisms that do not usually cause disease in healthy individuals may be responsible for serious illness in a person whose immune system is weakened. These microorganisms are called "opportunistic" because they produce illness only when they infect a person whose immune system is not functioning properly.

The immune system functions through a complex interaction of cells and proteins that resist or control infection by killing invading microorganisms. Key components of this system are the T-helper cells known as T4 cells (also called CD4 cells). These T4 cells are a specialized subgroup of T-lymphocytes (which are a type of white blood cell) that are responsible for coordinating the function of many other cells in the immune system.

A person with HIV (human immuno-deficiency virus) infection has a weakened immune system and is susceptible to opportunistic organisms because HIV attacks and disables T4 cells.

The following provides answers to commonly asked questions about MAC, an opportunistic infection seen in people who are infected with HIV.

[See the topic on aegis.org](http://aegis.org)