

# The Other Genome: A Systematic Review of Studies of Mitochondrial DNA Haplogroups and Outcomes of HIV Infection and Antiretroviral Therapy

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## Abstract

**Mitochondrial toxicity is implicated in some treatment-limiting antiretroviral therapy complications, and reports of mitochondrial dysfunction in untreated HIV infection suggest antiretroviral therapy independent effects of HIV. Several studies have explored associations between mtDNA haplogroups (patterns of mtDNA polymorphisms) and outcomes of HIV infection and/or antiretroviral therapy, but findings have been inconsistent. We systematically reviewed published studies examining mtDNA haplogroups in HIV-infected persons to summarize reported outcome associations, and to highlight potential future research directions. We identified 21 articles published from 2005-2013. Multiple different phenotypes were studied; most were antiretroviral therapy associated metabolic outcomes (e.g. lipodystrophy, insulin resistance, and dyslipidemia). Haplogroup H was associated with the most outcomes, including AIDS progression, CD4 T-cell recovery, cirrhosis (in hepatitis C coinfection), and metabolic outcomes. This review is the first to focus on the emerging area of mtDNA haplogroups in HIV, and summarizes the published literature on associations between mtDNA haplogroups and clinical outcomes in populations of European and African descent. Several reported associations require replication and ideally biological verification before definitive conclusions can be drawn, but research in this area has the potential to explain outcome disparities and impact clinical management of patients. (AIDS Rev. 2013;15:213-20)**

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## Key words

**HIV. Mitochondrial DNA. Haplogroup. Antiretroviral therapy.**

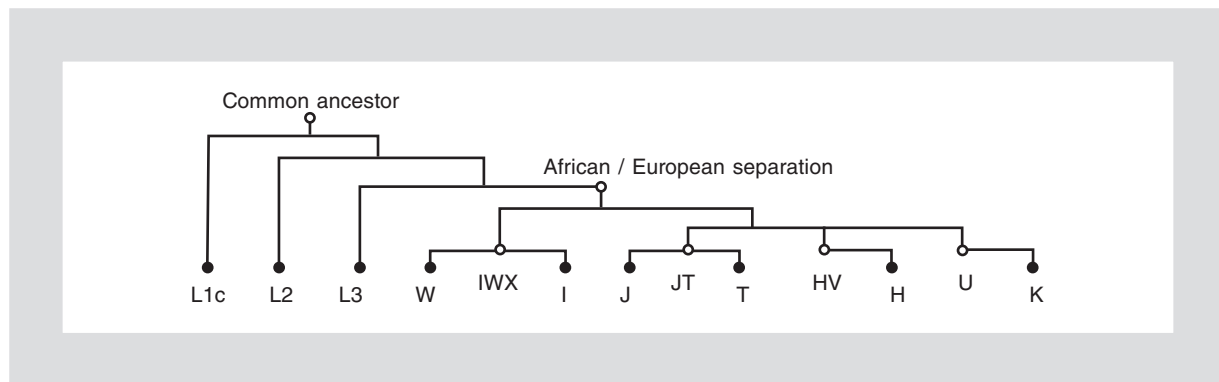
## Introduction

Potent antiretroviral therapy (ART) has significantly reduced the morbidity and mortality associated with HIV infection and AIDS<sup>1</sup>. The initial treatment for HIV-1 infection includes two nucleoside reverse-transcriptase inhibitors (NRTI) plus another agent from a second class, typically a protease inhibitor or nonnucleoside reverse-transcriptase inhibitor. Unfortunately, the use

of these agents has been associated with treatment-limiting toxicities<sup>2</sup>. The NRTI inhibit viral replication by competing with endogenous cellular nucleotides for incorporation into proviral DNA and are relatively specific for HIV reverse transcriptase. However, NRTI also inhibit human mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) polymerase- $\gamma$ , which may lead to mtDNA depletion and mitochondrial dysfunction<sup>3,4</sup>. Mitochondrial dysfunction has been associated with toxicities such as peripheral neuropathy, lipodystrophy, myopathy/cardiomyopathy, pancreatitis, lactic acidosis, and hepatic steatosis<sup>4</sup>. Other ART classes have mitochondrial effects<sup>5-7</sup>, and more contemporary ART-associated metabolic toxicities (e.g. dyslipidemia, insulin resistance, renal dysfunction, and bone disease) may also have a mitochondrial etiology<sup>8-10</sup>. Additionally, several antiretroviral drugs have been shown to induce mitochondrial toxicity through mechanisms other than the inhibition of mtDNA polymerase- $\gamma$ <sup>11-13</sup>.

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**Figure 1.** Partial phylogenetic tree demonstrating approximate relationships between mtDNA haplogroups having significant associations reported in reviewed studies.

Mitochondria play an important role in energy production and in other metabolic pathways such as biosynthesis of heme, cholesterol, and phospholipids, and are also major regulators of apoptosis<sup>14,15</sup>. Through oxidative phosphorylation, mitochondria convert calories to adenosine triphosphate (ATP) and generate reactive oxygen species (ROS). Each human cell contains hundreds of mitochondria and thousands of mtDNA. The human mitochondrial genome is inherited maternally and is made up of a circular double-stranded mtDNA molecule that encodes ribosomal RNA, transfer RNA, and 13 polypeptides that are essential for oxidative phosphorylation. Over millennia, single nucleotide polymorphisms in the mitochondrial genome have emerged. The combinations of these polymorphisms define mitochondrial haplotypes (generally referred to as "haplogroups")<sup>16</sup>. Mitochondrial haplogroups have a well defined phylogeny that has been used to map and understand prehistoric human migrations and genetic differences among populations<sup>14</sup>. Nine major haplogroups (H, T, U, V, W, X, J, I, and K) have been identified in persons of European descent (Fig. 1)<sup>17</sup>. Typically, a large proportion (approximately 40%) of any population of European descent is haplogroup H. Haplogroup structures are more complex in populations of African and Asian descent<sup>16</sup>. For a full description of the human mitochondrial phylogenetic tree we recommend the Phylotree resource ([www.phylotree.org](http://www.phylotree.org))<sup>18</sup>.

Numerous studies have shown possible associations between haplogroups and aging and various diseases. For example, haplogroup J has been associated with longevity in northern Italians<sup>19</sup> and Finns<sup>20</sup>. It has also been shown to be protective against Parkinson's disease<sup>21</sup> and to increase the phenotypic expression of certain mutations associated with Leber hereditary optic neuropathy (LHON), a rare cause of adult-onset

blindness<sup>22</sup>. Molecular mechanisms underlying functional differences between haplogroups are unknown, but may reflect impaired energy production. One possibility is that subtle functional effects of mtDNA variation represented by different haplogroups influence ATP production, ROS, heat generation, and apoptosis<sup>23</sup>. It is plausible that exposure to certain drugs, especially NRTI, may precipitate clinical mitochondrial dysfunction in genetically predisposed individuals. Case reports of late-onset LHON occurring in HIV-infected persons only after NRTI exposure lend support to this hypothesis<sup>24</sup>.

In the last decade, several studies have explored associations between mtDNA haplogroups and outcomes of HIV infection and ART. Our objective was to systematically review published studies of mtDNA haplogroups in HIV-infected persons. We wanted to focus on this emerging and potentially important area, summarizing reported associations between mtDNA haplogroups and clinical outcomes that have been studied to date, assessing strengths and limitations of these data, and highlighting potential future research directions. The clinical implications of this area of research are not yet known, but could include: better genomic predictors of HIV disease and/or treatment outcomes; an improved understanding of host factors underlying outcome disparities; and informing the application of existing (and development of new) mitochondria-targeted interventions.

## Search strategy and article selection

A systematic review was performed using PubMed and the search terms: Mitochondrial haplogroups OR mitochondrial genomics OR mitochondrial haplotypes AND HIV, without publication year restriction. Bibliographies

**Table 1. Significant associations between outcomes and haplogroups by  $p \leq 0.05$ , and directions of association**

| Phenotypes                 | References | Haplogroups |    |           |   |     |      |   |    |   |    |        |                   |   |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------|----|-----------|---|-----|------|---|----|---|----|--------|-------------------|---|
|                            |            | L1c         | L2 | L3        | W | IWX | I    | J | JT | T | HV | H      | U                 | K |
| Lipoatrophy                | [35-37]    |             |    |           | ↓ |     | ↑    |   |    | ↓ |    | ↑      |                   | ↑ |
| Insulin resistance         | [50, 51]   |             |    |           |   |     |      |   |    |   | ↓  | ↓      | ↑                 |   |
| Dyslipidemia               | [36, 41]   |             |    | ↑ (L3e1)* |   |     | ↑†↓‡ |   |    |   |    |        |                   |   |
| Atherogenic risk           | [50]       |             |    |           |   |     |      |   | ↑  | ↑ | ↓  | ↓      |                   |   |
| Peripheral neuropathy      | [31-33]    | ↑↓          |    |           |   |     |      |   |    | ↑ |    |        |                   |   |
| Hepatic fibrosis/cirrhosis | [63]       |             |    |           |   |     |      |   |    |   | ↓  | ↓      | ↑§                |   |
| Neuroretinal disorders     | [66]       |             |    |           |   |     |      | ↓ |    |   |    | ↓ (H3) | ↓ (U5a)           |   |
| CD4 cell recovery          | [73, 76]   |             | ↓¶ |           |   |     |      | ↓ | ↓  |   |    | ↑      |                   |   |
| AIDS progression           | [72, 75]   |             |    |           |   | ↓   |      | ↑ |    |   | ↓  | ↓ (H3) | ↓ (Uk)<br>↑ (U5a) |   |

\*Median fasting triglyceride and likelihood of hypertriglyceridemia; †Median total cholesterol, non-HDL, and LDL at baseline; ‡Median change in total cholesterol, non-HDL, LDL, and triglycerides at 96 weeks; §Association only seen with cirrhosis; ¶Same population and haplogroup had association with lower baseline and lower relative decrease in CD4 T-cell activation (% CD38+/HLA-DR\*) at 48 weeks of ART<sup>74</sup>.

were reviewed for additional publications. We included peer-reviewed studies that reported associations between mtDNA haplogroups and any phenotype in HIV-infected adults or HIV/ART-exposed children; non-English language publications were excluded. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)<sup>25</sup> checklist and flow diagram were used (Supplementary data) to guide this review. After the initial PubMed search, article abstracts were reviewed to determine if inclusion criteria were met. All authors were required to agree that an article reported mtDNA haplogroups in an HIV-infected or exposed population, and that an association with an HIV-related phenotype was assessed. A single author (Hart) reviewed included articles and collected specific study information using a data abstraction table (Supplementary table). Uncertainties regarding specific study information were resolved by consensus decision of the authors.

Forty-four non-duplicate reports were identified through the initial search strategies (Flow diagram; Supplemental figure). After review, 21 of these met criteria for inclusion and qualitative review (Supplementary table). Of these, 11 were cohorts and 10 were

cross-sectional analyses from cohort studies. Studies primarily included persons of either European or African descent, and sample sizes ranged from 29 to 1,833. The populations studied are difficult to define as multiple publications used study participants from the same cohorts. For example, five out of the 21 studies included participants from the AIDS clinical trials group (ACTG) study 384, two included subjects from the Multi-center AIDS Cohort Study (MACS), and two studies included subjects from a Spanish hepatitis C virus (HCV)/HIV-coinfection cohort. Therefore, 13 distinct populations and multiple phenotypes were evaluated in the reviewed articles. Genetic material for most reviewed studies was from peripheral blood or buccal smears; two studies used lymphoblastoid B-cell lines and one study used frozen leukocyte pellets. Various genotyping platforms were used (predominantly TaqMan and Affymetrix), and haplogroups were determined using multiple methods. In the sections that follow, we highlight relevant data from HIV-uninfected populations, then summarize findings from studies of related phenotypes in HIV-infected populations. Significant associations ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) from these studies are summarized in table 1.

## Associations with classic nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor mitochondrial toxicities

Inherited mtDNA diseases commonly include neurodegenerative and/or neuropathy phenotypes. Familial amyloidotic polyneuropathy (FAP) is an autosomal, dominant-inherited systemic amyloidosis presenting clinically as a progressive sensory-motor peripheral neuropathy. Oxidative damage, caused by free radical injury and protein misfolding are thought to play a role in the pathogenesis of this disease. Since both of these processes involve mitochondria, a possible association has been investigated and haplogroup K was found to be associated with early-onset FAP in Swedish and French patients<sup>26</sup>. Peripheral neuropathy is common in HIV-infected persons, and is characterized by distal, symmetric anesthesia, and/or painful dysesthesia<sup>27</sup>. Peripheral neuropathy can develop in untreated HIV infection, but most cases have been seen in ART-treated individuals, particularly those treated with a NRTI<sup>28</sup>. Mitochondrial injury is thought to play a role in NRTI-associated peripheral neuropathy. Studies have shown depletion of mtDNA content in the neurons exposed to certain NRTI<sup>29</sup> and selective inhibition of the mtDNA polymerase- $\gamma$  in neuronal cell lines<sup>30</sup>. In the reviewed studies, individuals with European haplogroup T and African haplogroup L1c had an increased risk of developing peripheral neuropathy (Table 1) in the ACTG study 384<sup>31,32</sup>, but L1c was associated with a lower likelihood of HIV-associated sensory neuropathy in the CNS HIV Antiretroviral Therapy Effects Research (CHARTER) study<sup>33</sup>. These contrasting results highlight the need for careful selection of population and study design, and phenotype ascertainment.

Lipoatrophy is another consequence of NRTI exposure<sup>34</sup>. Mitochondrial toxicity is thought to play a primary role in the pathogenesis of this syndrome<sup>34</sup>. Associations between mtDNA haplogroups and lipoatrophy have been reported in US populations of non-Hispanic white race, and in an Italian population. Haplogroups H, I, and K were associated with increased lipoatrophy in HIV treated individuals, while haplogroups T and W were protective<sup>35-37</sup>. One of these studies<sup>35</sup> defined lipoatrophy clinically and used a cross-sectional analytic approach; the other<sup>36</sup> defined lipoatrophy as change in limb fat from baseline during ART using dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA). The third study used both clinical criteria and anthropometric measurements<sup>37</sup>. Four other studies did not find statistically significant associations between haplogroups

and lipoatrophy or lipodystrophy (a syndrome of mixed lipoatrophy and visceral lipohypertrophy, usually including dyslipidemia and insulin resistance), although two of these reported trends<sup>38-41</sup>.

One study examined HIV-uninfected children that were exposed to antiretrovirals *in utero* and evaluated possible mtDNA haplogroup associations with diseases linked with mitochondrial dysfunction. Although haplogroup H tended to be less frequent in children with mitochondrial dysfunction, these results lacked statistical significance<sup>42</sup>. Finally, Arenas-Pinto, et al.<sup>43</sup> examined relationships between mtDNA polymorphisms and severe hyperlactatemia in small South African and European populations, and did not find statistically significant associations in either.

## Associations with HIV-related and/or antiretroviral therapy related complications potentially having mitochondrial mechanisms

Mitochondria are known to play a key role in glucose metabolism, cellular energy balance, and ATP production, which has been linked to insulin secretion in pancreatic beta cells<sup>44</sup>, and insulin resistance<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, it is thought that mtDNA alterations are involved in type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM). Associations between mtDNA haplogroups and T2DM have been observed in a Jewish population<sup>46</sup>, persons from southern Brazil<sup>47</sup>, and Asians<sup>48</sup>. Mechanisms by which mtDNA haplogroups modulate susceptibility to T2DM still remain elusive. Of note, a population-based study of Europeans did not find significant associations between common mtDNA variants and T2DM<sup>49</sup>.

Insulin resistance is also part of the lipodystrophy syndrome, and its association with mtDNA haplogroups has been recently evaluated. Micheloud, et al. found that individuals with insulin resistance, defined by the homeostatic model assessment (HOMA), were more likely to belong to haplogroup U and less likely to belong to haplogroup H or the combined haplogroup HV<sup>50</sup>. Although not a primary outcome, we also recently reported an association between haplogroup U and increased HOMA after 24 weeks of ART in a small ACTG cardiovascular substudy (A5152s) population<sup>51</sup>.

Mitochondria are also thought to play a role in cardiovascular diseases. One study proposed that failure in DNA repair and mitochondrial dysfunction contributes to hyperlipidemia and increased fat storage, promoting atherosclerosis and the metabolic syndrome<sup>52</sup>. Various mtDNA haplogroups have been associated

with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy in a cohort of HIV-uninfected Spanish patients<sup>53</sup>, increased risk for coronary atherosclerosis in elderly Japanese<sup>54</sup>, and protection against the development of metabolic syndrome in Japanese women<sup>55</sup>. However, a study conducted by Benn, et al.<sup>56</sup> did not find associations between mitochondrial haplogroups and risk of ischemic cardiovascular disease in a large population of European descent. Mitochondria play a major role in energy metabolism; thus, mitochondrial dysfunction is thought to play a role in cardiovascular risk factors like metabolic disorders and obesity. Haplogroup X was found to be strongly associated with both body mass index and body fat mass in Caucasian subjects<sup>57</sup>. In another study, no associations between body mass index and common mtDNA variants were seen<sup>49</sup>.

Metabolic syndrome and increased cardiovascular risk have been seen in HIV-infected patients treated with ART including protease inhibitors<sup>8</sup>. Mechanisms by which mtDNA variation may influence ART-associated dyslipidemia are not known, but mitochondrial function is thought to play a role in lipid metabolism<sup>58</sup> and cardiovascular disease<sup>59</sup>. Two studies reported significant associations between haplogroups and lipid parameters<sup>36,50</sup>. Non-Hispanic white individuals in the ACTG study A5142 belonging to haplogroup I had higher lipids at baseline (pre-ART), and also had significantly greater percentage decreases in non-HDL cholesterol at week 96 of ART<sup>36</sup>. Micheloud, et al. further investigated cardiovascular risk using the atherogenic index (total cholesterol/HDL) and observed that haplogroups T and JT were associated with a high atherogenic index, while haplogroups H and HV were protective<sup>50</sup>. In a cross-sectional analysis of an Italian metabolic clinic cohort, no statistically significant associations between European mtDNA haplogroups and metabolic abnormalities (glucose and lipids), viro-immunological features (HIV viral load, CD4 cell count, and nadir CD4 cell count), or acid-base parameters (lactate level and anion gap) were observed<sup>39</sup>. A recent study of black South Africans in Cape Town identified an association between a L3 sub-haplogroup (L3e1) and hypertriglyceridemia in predominantly protease-inhibitor-treated subjects<sup>41</sup>.

Persons coinfecting with HIV and HCV exhibit a higher rate of liver fibrosis and cirrhosis as compared to HCV mono-infected patients<sup>60</sup>. Hepatitis C is thought to lead to liver damage in part by increasing lipoperoxidation, which may lead to the depletion of mtDNA and eventually increased ROS production<sup>61</sup>. Recent data also demonstrated adverse effects of HCV infection on

hepatic mitochondrial function, particularly in complex IV<sup>62</sup>. Three European haplogroups were found to be associated with fibrosis and cirrhosis in a Spanish cohort: haplogroups H and HV were less likely to have advanced fibrosis and cirrhosis, while haplogroup U was associated with greater likelihood of cirrhosis<sup>63</sup>.

As mentioned above, background mitochondrial haplogroup variations have been found in various genetic and acquired neuro-ophthalmic diseases such as LHON, and haplogroup J has been associated with the expression of certain LHON mutations<sup>24,64</sup>. Neuroretinal disorder (NRD) is a cause of visual dysfunction that results in abnormal contrast sensitivity, color vision, and visual fields<sup>65</sup>. The pathogenesis of HIV-associated NRD is unknown, but mitochondria and mtDNA variation likely play a role in this disease, based on studies of LHON<sup>24</sup>. Hendrickson, et al. examined associations between NRD and haplogroups in the Longitudinal Study of the Ocular Complications of AIDS (LSOCA) cohort. They observed that haplogroups J, U5a, and H3 were associated with delayed progression to NRD in HIV-infected individuals of European descent<sup>66</sup>.

### Associations with HIV disease progression and CD4 T-cell recovery

Apart from the potential relationships between mtDNA and ART toxicity, mitochondrial function plays a critical role in T-cell function and turnover<sup>6,67-71</sup>. Progression of AIDS and CD4 cell recovery after ART initiation have not been confirmed to be linked to mitochondrial function, but investigations by several groups suggest there might be a relationship between these outcomes and mtDNA variation. Haplogroups J and U5a were associated with accelerated progression to AIDS and death, while haplogroups Uk, H3, and IWX appeared to be protective against AIDS progression<sup>72</sup>. In another study, African haplogroup L2 was associated with poorer CD4 cell recovery 48 weeks after ART initiation among non-Hispanic blacks in the ACTG Study 384<sup>73</sup>, and the same haplogroup was associated with lower CD4 T-cell activation (measured by CD38/HLA-DR expression) at baseline, and less decrease in activation after 48 weeks of ART in this population<sup>74</sup>. No European haplogroups were statistically associated with CD4 cell recovery in that analysis. Two recent studies from Spain have also reported associations between European haplogroup H (and clade HV) and lower likelihood of AIDS progression<sup>75</sup> and improved CD4 count recovery during at least 24 months of follow-up after initiating ART<sup>76</sup>.



## Summary and limitations of reviewed studies

The field of mitochondrial medicine has exhibited a major expansion in the last two decades<sup>14,77</sup>. The fundamental question of why human mtDNA haplogroups could have functional differences remains controversial<sup>23,78-81</sup>. This review focused on the emerging area of mtDNA haplogroups in HIV infection, and we have summarized associations between mtDNA haplogroups and clinical outcomes to date. Similar to HIV-uninfected populations, mitochondrial haplogroups have been found to be associated with insulin resistance, cardiovascular disease, lipids, neuroretinal disorders, and abnormal fat metabolism and/or distribution (lipodystrophy) in HIV-infected individuals. Additionally, associations between mitochondrial haplogroups and HIV-specific phenotypes such as AIDS progression and CD4 recovery have also been reported. Though the effects of some ART on mitochondrial function and their associated clinical toxicities are well recognized, it is also important to note that there are direct effects of HIV on mitochondrial function and mtDNA that may be influenced by mtDNA variation and/or affected by subsequent ART. Several studies in recent years have observed abnormal mitochondrial phenotypes (including decreased mtDNA quantity) in peripheral blood mononuclear cells from ART-naïve HIV-infected compared with HIV-negative individuals<sup>68,70,82,83</sup>.

There are several limitations of the reviewed studies. Genetic association studies require large sample sizes in order to identify significant differences in populations. The largest study in our review had only 1,833 subjects<sup>72</sup>, with most others having substantially fewer, limiting the capacity to identify significant associations. Many studies reported trends in their data that might (or might not) have been significant with a larger sample size. While this may have introduced type II error and false negative associations, type I error and false positive associations are also likely. Few studies explicitly addressed adjustment of p-value to correct for multiple comparisons, perhaps in part because there is no standard approach. Additionally, there is inconsistency in the reporting of combined haplogroups used in some studies. As mentioned previously, not only were the studied populations small, but many included overlapping cohort populations. Furthermore, most of the studies included HIV-infected populations of European ancestry, thus there is a notable lack of published studies in populations of African descent, and none to date in Asian populations. This is discordant with the

populations most affected by the HIV pandemic. Multiple phenotypes were investigated and multiple studies examined similar phenotypes using different methods and/or definitions, therefore introducing the potential for ascertainment bias in phenotypic classification. For example, lipodystrophy/lipodystrophy was assessed in some studies using DEXA<sup>36,38,39,41</sup>, while others used clinical assessments and physical exam<sup>35,37,40</sup>. Antiretroviral therapy is associated with mitochondrial injury and clinical toxicities; most of the reviewed studies either excluded ART-treated subjects or adjusted for ART use (Supplementary Table). Finally, the most glaring limitation of the studies in this area is the lack of replication to confirm preliminary associations. It is well known that initial associations tend to overestimate effect size and are rarely replicated in independent datasets<sup>84</sup>. Due to several of the factors discussed above (e.g. small sample sizes, inconsistent phenotype definitions), as well as limited cohorts available, replication studies in this field have lagged.

The methods of defining mitochondrial haplogroups have developed rapidly in recent years. The earliest studies relied on limited single nucleotide polymorphism lists with nucleotide calls based on TaqMan Assays. These older methods relied on haplogroup definitions<sup>17</sup> that were sufficient for the definition of the major European haplogroups, but that are insufficient for the full range of African or Asian haplogroups. More recent studies<sup>32,33,73</sup> have used chip-based sequencing methods that give more sequence information and allow for more robust haplogroup assignments, though methods based on a more limited number of target single nucleotide polymorphisms are still used due to their low cost.

## Conclusions

Our paper offers the first review of the emerging area of mitochondrial haplogroups, HIV infection, and clinical outcomes. Although provocative, reported associations are inconclusive due to heterogeneous methods and outcomes, limited racial/ethnic groups, lack of replication, and inadequate statistical power. Further studies are needed to clarify the role of mitochondrial genetics in the pathogenesis of various clinical outcomes and toxicities associated with ART, and to elucidate the importance of mitochondrial function and genetic variation in HIV disease outcomes and aging, independent of drug toxicities. Future investigations could combine existing study populations using uniform phenotype definitions and a meta-analytic approach in increased

sample sizes. New studies in larger populations (either existing cohort studies with capacity for genetic analyses or inclusion of mtDNA haplogroups in prospective studies that incorporate genetic studies and DNA collection<sup>85</sup>) would allow for replication (or refutation) of previous associations and identification of associations previously missed due to limited sample sizes. Finally, as mentioned earlier, there is only a limited amount of information available about possible mechanisms behind the various associations, and the role of mitochondrial function in these phenotypes will require continued investigation. Definitive conclusions cannot yet be drawn, but research in this area has the potential to explain, at least in part, disparities in outcomes and impact patient management across diverse populations affected by HIV.

## Conflicts of interest and source of funding

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