

Fox 8 House Calls:

Sickle Cell Disease

Sickle Cell Disease– Key Information¹

Definition:

Sickle cell disease is a disorder of the red blood cells that is inherited. Instead of having normal red blood cells, the cells are distorted and die early, causing a constant shortage of red blood cells.

Causes:

Sickle cell disease is an inherited disease in which the child receives one sickle cell from each parent.

Symptoms:

Symptoms do not occur until about 4 or 5 months of age. This is because baby or fetal hemoglobin protects the red blood cells from sickling; however, at about 4 or 5 months of age, the fetal hemoglobin turns into adult hemoglobin and the blood cells are no longer protected. Symptoms may include:

- Swelling of the hands and feet
- Episodes of intense pain
- Anemia, tiredness, jaundice, dizziness, slow growth, delayed puberty, difficulty breathing
- Infections such as pneumonia
- Acute chest syndrome
- Splenic Sequestration
- Vision loss
- Leg ulcers (usually occurs between ages 10-50)
- Stroke
- Damage to organs, bones and tissues
- Gall stones

Diagnosis:

Sickle cell disease can be determined by a blood test; usually the blood tests performed at birth will confirm the disease in a child.

Treatment/Cure:

- The only cure for the disease is bone marrow or stem cell transplant.
- Symptoms can be treated, and depending on the symptom, treatment options may include; pain medicine, drinking water, rest, vaccinations, and blood transfusions.

Pregnancy:

- A woman who has sickle cell disease and becomes pregnant has an increased chance of complications that will affect her health, and that of the unborn baby.
- Often, the side effects of sickle cell disease will increase during pregnancy and episodes of pain can become more frequent and severe.
- There is a test during pregnancy to determine if your baby will have sickle cell disease; however the gene is recessive, meaning both parents must pass on the gene for a child to have the disease.

- Pregnant women with sickle cell disease can have a normal and healthy pregnancy if they take the necessary precautions and engage in early pre-natal care.

Healthy living with sickle cell disease:

- Find a medical care facility with doctors who specialize in blood disorders
- Get regular check-ups
- Get vaccinated to avoid infections
- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid becoming too hot or too cold
- Participate in physical activity but don't overdo it
- Get plenty of rest
- Find or establish a support group

¹ Sickle Cell Disease, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*,
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell/healthyliving-living-well.html>