



Sickle Cell Awareness Month

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is a condition that affects people around the world. Due to the serious health problems associated with SCD there is a need to know more about the disease.

About Sickle Cell Disease:

Sickle cell anemia is a disease passed down through families. The red blood cells that are normally shaped like a disc take on a sickle or crescent shape. Red blood cells carry oxygen throughout the body.

Among those with SCD, their red blood cells become hard and sticky and look like a C-shaped farm tool called a "sickle". The sickle-shaped cells die early, which causes a constant shortage of red blood cells. When a person doesn't have enough red blood cells, they have a condition called *anemia*. Also, when these misshaped blood cells travel through small blood vessels, they can get stuck and clog the blood flow. Whenever this happens, it results in severe pain and organ damage and can cause serious infections.

The Many Faces of Sickle Cell Disease:

Sickle cell disease (SCD) affects people of many racial and ethnic groups. More than 2 million people carry the sickle cell gene that allows them potentially to pass the disease on to their children.

Causes:

- ✚ Sickle cell anemia is caused by an abnormal type of hemoglobin called hemoglobin S. Hemoglobin is a protein inside red blood cells that carries oxygen.
- ✚ Hemoglobin S changes the red blood cells. The red blood cells become fragile and shaped like crescents or sickles.
- ✚ The abnormal cells deliver less oxygen to the body's tissues.
- ✚ They can also easily get stuck in small blood vessels and break into pieces. This can interrupt healthy blood flow and cut down even more on the amount of oxygen flowing to body tissues.

Symptoms:

Symptoms usually do not occur until after the age of 4 months which include:

- ✚ Fatigue.
- ✚ Paleness.
- ✚ Rapid heart rate.
- ✚ Shortness of breath.
- ✚ Yellowing of the eyes and skin (jaundice).
- ✚ Younger children with sickle cell anemia have attacks of abdominal pain.
- ✚ Painful and prolonged erection (priapism).
- ✚ Poor eyesight or blindness.
- ✚ Problems with thinking or confusion caused by small strokes.

- 🔗 Ulcers on the lower legs (in adolescents and adults).
- 🔗 Bone infection (osteomyelitis).
- 🔗 Gallbladder infection (cholecystitis).
- 🔗 Lung infection (pneumonia).
- 🔗 Urinary tract infection.
- 🔗 Delayed growth and puberty.
- 🔗 Painful joints caused by arthritis.
- 🔗 Heart failure due to too much iron (from blood transfusions).

How Can Sickle Cell Anemia Be Prevented?

You can't prevent sickle cell anemia, because it's an inherited disease. If a person is born with it, steps should be taken to reduce complications. People who are at high risk of having a child with sickle cell anemia and are planning to have children may want to consider genetic counseling. A counselor can explain the risk (likelihood) of having a child who has the disease. He or she also can help explain the choices that are available.

People with SCD can live productive lives and enjoy most of the activities that people without SCD do. These are some things that people with SCD can do to stay as healthy as possible:

- 🔗 **Get regular checkups.** Regular health checkups with a primary care doctor can help prevent some serious problems.
- 🔗 **Prevent infections.** Common illnesses, like influenza quickly can become dangerous for a child with SCD. The best defense is to take simple steps to help prevent infections.
- 🔗 **Learn healthy habits.** People with SCD should drink 8 to 10 glasses of water every day and eat healthy food. They also should try not to get too hot, too cold, or too tired.
- 🔗 **Look for clinical studies.** New clinical research studies are happening all the time to find better treatments and, hopefully, a cure for SCD. People who take part in these studies might have access to new medicines and treatments.
- 🔗 **Get support.** People with SCD should find a patient support group or other organization in the community that can provide information, assistance, and support.

The goals of the SCD working group are to:

Provide information and increase awareness of SCD and sickle cell trait among external audiences such as health care providers, community organizations, affected patients and their families, and the general public. Increase research and surveillance to determine the prevalence of SCD, develop better management guidelines, and more effectively monitor complications of the disease.

Reference Links:

- 🔗 <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sca/prevention.html>
- 🔗 <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000527.htm>
- 🔗 <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/sicklecellawareness/>

For any enquiry or assistance please contact: wellness@medicaretpa.co.in

Disclaimer: No information contained here should be relied on in making health decisions. Always check with your doctor or other health care provider.