

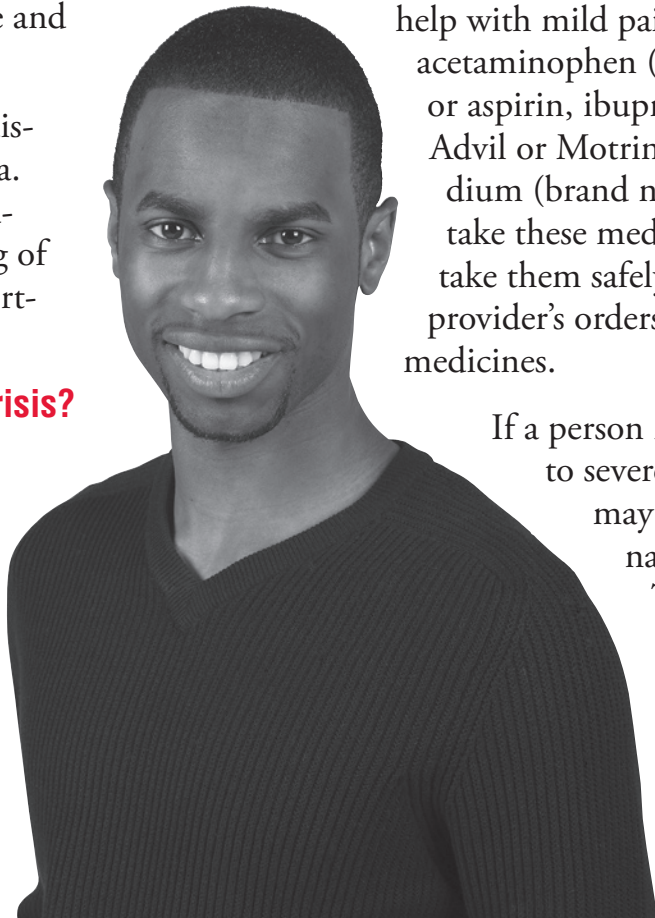
What is Sickle Cell Disease?

Sickle cell disease is also called sickle cell anemia. This is a disease that some people are born with that affects red blood cells. People with sickle cell disease do not have normal red blood cells. Normal red blood cells are round, soft and look like a doughnut without the hole. With sickle cell disease, the red blood cells can change shape and become hard and pointed. Because the cells are shaped like a sickle they cannot move easily through small blood vessels and can get “stuck”. This is not good because it can stop or slow blood flow to parts of the body. This is what causes pain, stroke and damage to the organs.

People with sickle cell disease usually have anemia. Anemia may cause tiredness, paleness, yellowing of the skin and eyes or shortness of breath.

What is a sickle cell crisis?

A “sickle cell crisis” or “pain crisis” happens when sickle cells block blood flow to organs, arms, legs, chest or stomach and cause pain or problems. The pain can begin suddenly and last several hours



to several days. The pain can be in the back, knees, legs, arms, chest or stomach. It can be throbbing, sharp, dull, or stabbing. How often and how bad the pain gets is different for each person.

Some people with sickle cell disease may be able to treat pain at home with medicines taken by mouth. Others may need to go to the emergency room if the medicines do not work, if they cannot keep fluids down, or if the pain is very bad.

What medicines can be used at home to control sickle cell pain?

Some over-the-counter medicines may help with mild pain. This includes acetaminophen (brand name: Tylenol) or aspirin, ibuprofen (brand names: Advil or Motrin), or naproxen sodium (brand name: Aleve). Only take these medicines if you can take them safely. Always follow your provider’s orders on over-the-counter medicines.

If a person is having moderate to severe pain, their provider may prescribe a mild narcotic like codeine.

This will be up to the provider to decide. Make sure to follow your provider’s instructions for taking the medicine.

What else can help control the pain?

- A heating pad, warm bath, massage, or rest
- Activities like watching television, computer games, or talking on the telephone

Important tips for preventing sickle cell crisis

- Drink plenty of fluids each day. Water is best, especially in warm or hot weather
- Stay away from cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal drugs
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet
- Wear warm clothes outside in cold weather and inside in air-conditioned rooms
- Exercise, but not so much that you become really tired. Take frequent breaks and drink lots of fluids.
- Take your medicine and vitamins as directed.
- Tell your PCP if you snore or sometimes wake up gasping for breath.
- Be careful in situations where you may not get enough oxygen (like in airplanes)

Complications of Sickle Cell Disease Infections

Infection is a major complication of sickle cell disease. The spleen is a small organ on the upper left side under the rib cage. It acts as part of the body’s defense system that fights infections. The spleen is a filter in the bloodstream.

Understanding Sickle Cell Disease

With sickle cell, the spleen usually quits working after 4 to 6 months of age. The spleen becomes damaged by the red blood cells. Because of this damage, the spleen is not able to get rid of bacteria from the blood. When bacteria grows in your blood, it can cause an infection or blood poisoning. This is also called Septicemia.

Stroke

A stroke happens when the brain doesn't get the blood it needs. This is one of the worst problems caused by sickle cell disease. Getting treated early can help prevent serious damage.

Chest Syndrome

Chest syndrome is a word used to describe chest pain, fever and "pneumonia-like" cough. It is caused by "sickled" cells in the lungs. Many times it is confused with pneumonia.

Preventive Care – What can be done to help sickle cell disease?

- Visit your primary care provider (PCP) at least every 6 months.
- Your PCP will order blood tests and check for damage to internal organs like the spleen and kidneys.

Dental visits

- Visit a dentist regularly – this will lower the chance of having mouth problems that can cause a sickle cell crisis.

- Tell the dentist you have sickle cell or if you have any mouth problems.
- Ask the dentist if you need to have a blood test (hemoglobin) to find out the level of anemia.
- Get cavities filled while they are small. Going to the dentist regularly will let the dentist find cavities early.

Eye care

- Visit an eye care provider once a year. Tell him or her that you have sickle cell.
- The eye care provider should do a simple eye exam.
- If you have any symptoms listed below, call your eye care provider right away.

Symptoms of eye problems

- Sudden loss of vision, wavy or a watery vision or a dark shadow in some part of your side vision.
- Blurry vision or loss of sight in one eye.
- Pain in the eye.
- Blood in the eye.

When should you call your PCP?

- Weakness on one side of the body or a sudden change in speech (like slurring)
- Trouble breathing
- Headache
- Trouble hearing or seeing
- Fever or signs of infection
- Pain that you cannot control

