



# SICKLE CELL DISEASE

## ***What is Sickle Cell Disease?***

People are born with sickle cell disease. The disease affects the body by making odd shaped red blood cells. Normal red blood cells are smooth and round. They move easily through the body to carry oxygen to all parts of the body. Sickle cells are red blood cells that are shaped like the curve of the moon. The cells are hard and sticky, and have difficulty carrying oxygen through the body. There are different types of sickle cell disease.

## ***What causes Sickle Cell Disease?***

A child is born with sickle cell disease when both mother and father have curved, sticky red blood cells. Sickle cell disease affects about 72,000 people in the United States. It is common in people whose families come from parts of Africa, South America, Cuba, Central America, Saudi Arabia, India, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. The families of most Americans who are affected come from Africa.

## ***How is Sickle Cell Disease diagnosed?***

A simple blood test can be done to see if a person has sickle cell disease. The same blood test can be done to see if a person can have a baby with the disease.

## ***What are the most common signs or symptoms of Sickle Cell Disease?***

Feeling very tired, being very pale, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), shortness of breath, anemia (low number of red blood cells), and pain. The signs and symptoms are different in each person. Some people have mild symptoms. Others have very severe symptoms and are often in the hospital for treatment. Pain can occur in any body organ or joint. Pain occurs because the curved, sticky red blood cells block the flow of blood to the organ or joint. Some people can have the pain once a year; others may have the pain 15 or more times a year. The pain can be sudden, long lasting or a mixture of the two. Sudden pain can last from hours to days. Long lasting pain can last from 3 to 6 months, limiting daily activities.

## ***What are medical problems caused by Sickle Cell Disease?***

Problems occur when the curved, sticky cells block blood from different parts of the body, damaging that part of the body. Most common problems are anemia, infections, lung tissue damage (similar to pneumonia), and stroke. Also, delayed growth in children, open sores on the legs, gallstones, and eye problems.

## ***What is the treatment for Sickle Cell Disease?***

Health care begins with early diagnosis. People with sickle cell disease need regular medical care to prevent or control symptoms. Treatment of symptoms often includes, drugs for infection, pain control, and blood transfusions. People with sickle cell disease should have a flu shot each year. Also, it is important to have a shot for pneumonia every year. Children with sickle cell disease need to have their growth checked with regular health care.

## ***What is the best way to live with Sickle Cell Disease?***

Eat a healthy diet. The doctor may order daily vitamins. Drink several glasses of water every day. Get a lot of rest and sleep. Exercise is important, but do not get overtired. Try to avoid stress, and becoming too hot or too cold. See the dentist routinely to prevent loss of teeth and infections. Learn as much as possible about the disease.

***Is there a cure for Sickle Cell Disease?***

Each symptom can be treated as it occurs. There is no complete cure for sickle cell disease at this time. Many people with sickle cell disease are in good health much of the time, and live fairly normal lives. Research is being done that may provide the ultimate cure.