

What is sickle cell disease?

Sickle Cell Disease is a condition that affects red blood cells. Healthy red blood cells are round and carry oxygen through the body. Red blood cells are sickle (or crescent) shaped in someone with Sickle Cell. They also become hard and sticky. This makes it difficult for them to travel through blood vessels. Sickle cells may die early, which causes a constant shortage of red blood cells.

What Causes Sickle Cell Disease?

People born with Sickle Cell inherit it from their parents. Sickle Cell is genetic. This means a person's mother and father carry the trait or have the disease. Sickle Cell Disease is not contagious. You can't catch it from someone who has it.

Who is Affected By Sickle Cell Disease?

Sickle Cell affects about 100,000 Americans. In the United States, Sickle Cell most commonly affects African-Americans. About one out of every 365 African-American babies born in the United States has Sickle Cell Disease. About one out of every 13 African-American babies is born with the sickle cell trait.

How is It Diagnosed?

A blood test is used to diagnose Sickle Cell. It is often found during routine screening at birth. Early diagnosis and treatment is important. Talk to your doctor about who should be tested.

Signs and Symptoms.

People with Sickle Cell have a higher risk of infection and other health problems. Symptoms vary from person to person. Sickle Cell makes it hard for blood to flow and causes clogged blood vessels. Some other problems caused by Sickle Cell are:

- Episodes of pain or crisis – mild to severe, that can last for any length of time
- Increased risk of infection
- Swelling in hands and feet, often along with a fever
- Eye disease

- Anemia
- Acute Chest Syndrome (ACS) – similar to pneumonia
- Strokes or seizures

Getting the Right Treatment.

There is no single best treatment for Sickle Cell. Treatment options are different for everyone depending on symptoms. Goals of treatment include:

- Relieving pain
- Avoiding infection
- Reducing risk of eye damage
- Preventing strokes or seizures

A doctor can help with the right treatment plan. This may include life changes and certain medication or treatments. Someone with Sickle Cell can live a long and healthy life. There are ways to stay healthy with this condition by:

- Completing regular checkups with a doctor
- Following a treatment plan from a doctor
- Preventing infections and practicing proper hand-washing
- Completing regular checkups with an eye doctor and dentist
 - Avoiding getting too hot or too cold
 - Limiting stress
 - Eating a healthy diet
 - Drinking plenty of water (8 to 10 glasses per day)

If you or your child has Sickle Cell talk to your doctor to learn more.



ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/sickle-cell-disease#genes
cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell/facts.html