NEWSLETTER

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SICKLE CELL ANEMIA

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

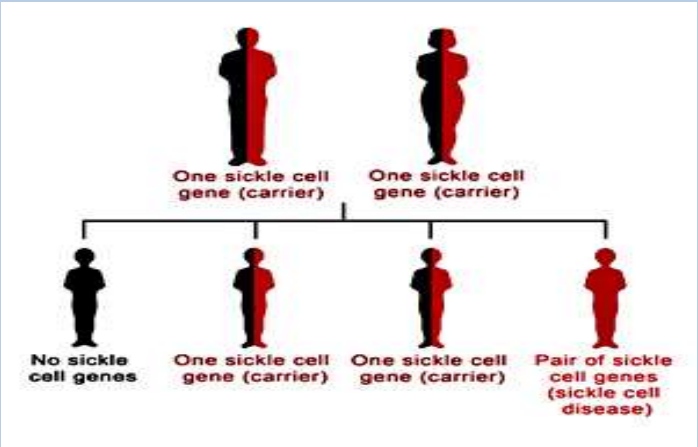
Sickle cell anemia is an inherited blood disorder, in which there are not enough healthy red blood cells (RBC) to carry oxygen throughout the body.

RBC contains hemoglobin which is smooth and round and carries oxygen to parts of the body. In sickle cell anemia, the RBCs are crescent shaped or sickled. This irregular shape causes them to become rigid and sticky slowing or blocking blood flow and oxygen to various parts of the body.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms vary from one individual to another and may change over time. They include;

- **Anemia: red blood cells usually last 120 days, but sickle cells last 10-20 days, leaving individuals with a shortage of RBC (anemia).**
- **Episodes of pain: occurs when sickled shaped RBC block flow to parts of the body. This deprives the tissues of oxygen resulting in severe pain. These episodes of pain are usually called Crisis and are a major symptom of sickle cell disease. They can be caused by illness, stress, temperature changes, dehydration and high altitudes.**
- **Frequent infections: Sickled cells can damage the spleen which is responsible for fighting infections. This leaves the individual more vulnerable to infections.**
- **Painful swelling in the hands and feet: caused by sickled cells blocking blood flow to hands and feet.**
- **Delayed growth: RBCs provide oxygen and nutrients needed for growth. A lack of RBCs can delay growth in infants and children and delay puberty in teenagers.**
- **Vision problems: sickled cells can plug the ducts that supply blood to the eyes, causing vision problems.**



DID YOU KNOW?

- Individuals with only one sickle cell gene are called carriers, and they are usually healthy individuals.
- Pain crisis can be prevented by drinking lots of water and keeping warm.
- Risk of infections in individuals affected with sickle cell can be reduced by taking daily antibiotics and ensuring vaccinations are completed.
- Sickle cell is more common in people of African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, Eastern Mediterranean and Asian origin.
- It is important to get regular medical care, live a healthy lifestyle, and avoid situations that may trigger a crisis.
- For sickle cell carriers planning on conceiving; it is important to seek counselling concerning the risks of having a child with sickle cell and possible treatments and reproductive options.

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