



Sarcoidosis

Sarcoidosis occurs when a person's immune system does not react properly to infections, leading to inflammation that can harm many organs in the body. In a healthy person, the immune system protects the body from harmful substances by sending chemicals to destroy them. Inflammation occurs during this process, but it subsides when the harmful substances are destroyed. In people with sarcoidosis, the inflammation does not go away. Instead, cells form in tiny clumps called granulomas. If too many granulomas form in an organ, the organ will not be able to work properly.

Sarcoidosis can be experienced in several parts of the body, but it often first affects the lungs and lymph nodes. It can also affect the eyes, skin, kidneys, heart, bones and other organs.

What causes sarcoidosis?

Like many autoimmune diseases, the exact cause of sarcoidosis is unknown, but scientists believe it develops when your immune system tries to protect your body from something dangerous. Genes may also play a role in causing the disease; siblings of a patient with sarcoidosis have a fivefold increased risk of developing it.

What are the signs and symptoms of sarcoidosis?

The symptoms of sarcoidosis vary depending on which organs are affected and how long it has been present. Many people who have sarcoidosis have no symptoms or mild ones, including:

- fatigue
- night sweats
- unexpected weight loss
- eye problems
- lumps or areas of skin that are discolored on the back, legs, arms, scalp, nose or eyes
- enlarged liver, spleen, salivary glands

When the disease affects the lungs, signs may include shortness of breath, cough and wheezing. When the disease affects the lymph nodes, signs may include enlarged, tender lymph nodes in your neck, chest, armpit or groin.

How do I find out if I have sarcoidosis?

Your health care provider can diagnose you with sarcoidosis based on medical history, a physical exam and other tests, such as chest X-rays and lung function tests.

What is the treatment for sarcoidosis?

Sarcoidosis sometimes goes away on its own. Whether you need treatment and what type depends on the symptoms and which organs are affected. The goals of treatment are to ease the symptoms, improve the way your organs work and reduce the size of granulomas. The most common treatment is a steroid called prednisone, which reduces inflammation. Other medicines used to treat sarcoidosis are hydroxychloroquine (for sarcoidosis that affects skin or brain) and methotrexate (for sarcoidosis that affects eyes, lungs, skin or joints).

How can I manage my sarcoidosis?

It is possible for the disease to get worse without you noticing, so ongoing care by your health care provider is very important. Your health care provider may use tests such as lung function tests and eye exams to assess the damage to your organs. Key suggestions for living with sarcoidosis include:

- follow a treatment plan
- engage in physical activity
- follow a healthy diet
- maintain a strong support system
- protect your lungs by avoiding smoke and lung irritants such as dust, fumes and pollution