

This condition results from abnormalities in the blood structure of certain individuals.

What to look for

- joint pain, pain in the abdomen, or along the arms and legs.
- fatigue, jaundice, and rapid heartbeat.
- recurring infections.
- delayed growth and development.
- a painful persistent erection

This disease is inherited and is quite common in African countries. To develop sickle cell anaemia, a person must inherit two sickle cell genes. When only one gene is present, a person has another form of sickle cell disease known as sickle cell trait in which they will not get the full blown disease.

This disease can have fatal consequences as it can affect different parts of the body. These people have episodes called 'crises' in which certain organs can be deprived of oxygen for a period of time. The frequency of these crises varies. If repeated enough, organ damage can be the result.

Causes

This disease is genetic.

It is vital that this disease be diagnosed and treated early. A blood test can identify people with the trait or the disease. Couples can be tested before conception.

Traditional Treatment

At present, no cure exists but people with the disease can learn to control the symptoms.

If your child has sickle-cell anaemia, it is important to guard them from infections, which can lead to dangerous complications. In addition to standard immunisations, your child should also receive vaccines for influenza and pneumococcus.

Ask your doctor about all the preventative steps you can take to help your child.

Prevention

Maintaining a good healthy diet, drinking plenty of fluids, taking regular, moderate exercise, and getting enough sleep. Avoid any infections if possible by teaching your child good dental hygiene, having regular check ups at the doctors and being current with all their vaccinations.

When to seek further professional advice

- your infant's hands or feet swell and the baby shows signs of anaemia.
- your affected child's abdomen is swollen and rigid.
- painful episodes persist more than several hours.