Living With Sarcoidosis

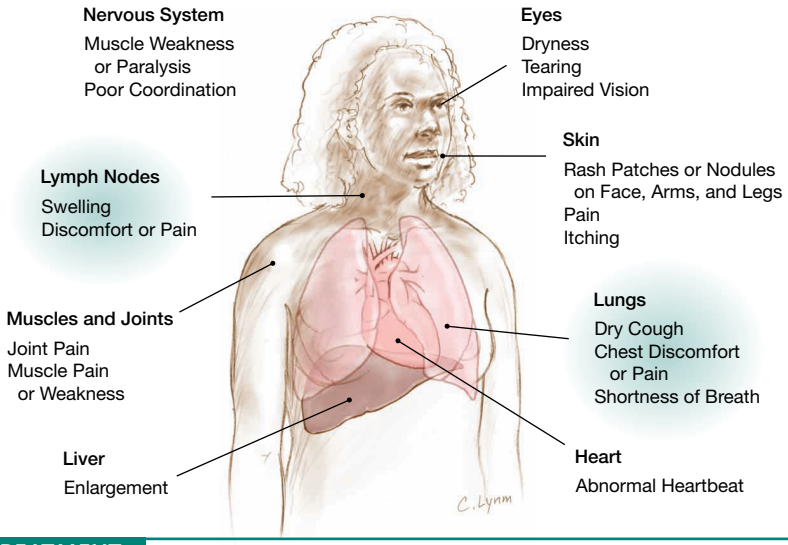
Sarcoidosis is a disease associated with **inflammation**, a response of cells to injury. The cause of injury to cells affected by sarcoidosis is unknown. It can affect almost any organ, but usually starts in the lungs or lymph nodes. Sarcoidosis can occur in anyone at any age, but is more common among individuals aged 20 to 40 years. It affects black individuals more commonly than white. Sarcoidosis is not contagious and is rarely fatal.

The March 13, 2002, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about treating sarcoidosis affecting the lungs with **corticosteroids**, a type of medication that reduces inflammation.

SYMPTOMS

Sarcoidosis usually develops slowly, although symptoms can appear suddenly and then disappear. The disease may be diagnosed by evaluating the patient's medical history, physical examination, and chest x-ray and eliminating other possible causes for the symptoms. Sarcoidosis may affect a variety of different organs. The lungs and lymph nodes are most commonly involved. Symptoms range from mild to severe. General symptoms may include fatigue, fever, and weight loss.

Symptoms in Patients With Sarcoidosis



TREATMENT

Sarcoidosis may go away without any treatment, and about 50% of people who get it recover completely. Depending on the severity of your symptoms, your doctor may either monitor you for several months or prescribe medication to treat the symptoms. The most common medications for sarcoidosis are corticosteroids, such as prednisone. Corticosteroids are often helpful in reducing symptoms, but may cause side effects such as mood swings, weight gain, increased blood pressure, and stomach ulcers. Therefore, their use should be carefully monitored.

Although much about sarcoidosis remains unknown, it is usually not disabling and often goes away in 2 to 3 years. People who have the disease for longer can usually lead normal lives.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
  301/592-8573
  www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- American Lung Association
  212/315-8700
  www.lungusa.org

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Sources: American Academy of Family Physicians, Arthritis Foundation, Mayo Foundation, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Sarcoidosis Resource Center, Vanderbilt Medical Center

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