

CRYOGLOBULINEMIA

What is Cryoglobulinemia?

Cryoglobulinemia is the presence of abnormal proteins that are occasionally found in the blood of people with some forms of autoimmune diseases, multiple myeloma, leukemia and certain forms of pneumonia. The proteins cause the blood to gel at low temperatures causing tissue necrosis.

What causes Cryoglobulinemia?

Type 1 cryoglobulinemia is often associated with lymphoma. Type 2 cryoglobulinemia is often associated with hepatitis C infection.

Who gets Cryoglobulinemia?

Drug use is a prime risk factor for cryoglobulinemia because more than 90% of cases of cryoglobulinemic vasculitis are associated with hepatitis C infections. Hepatitis C is acquired by drug injection (needle-sharing), tainted blood products and (probably rarely), sexual transmission.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include a rash on the lower limbs, arthritis, nerve damage and tissue necrosis of affected areas. Type II and III cryoglobulinemia frequently present as vasculitis, most commonly with recurrent lower extremity purpura, glomerulonephritis, and peripheral neuropathy.

How is Cryoglobulinemia diagnosed?

There are three types of cryoglobulins (antibodies that occurs under cold conditions) and knowing which type the patient has usually helps the doctor make the diagnosis.

What is the treatment?

Treatment depends on the type of cryoglobulin, underlying disease, and severity of symptoms.

Patients with cryoglobulinemia may require treatment with immunosuppressives or steroids. Cryoglobulinemia with severe hyperviscosity syndrome requires plasmapheresis and chemotherapy. The most effective treatment for cryoglobulinemia associated with hepatitis C has not yet been determined.

Brief use of steroids followed by 6 months of interferon alfa has produced clinical and liver function test improvement, but relapse of liver disease and vasculitis often occurs when interferon alfa is stopped.

What is Vasculitis?

Vasculitis is an inflammation of the blood vessels, arteries, veins or capillaries. Vasculitis is a family of diseases. The cause of vasculitis is unknown, but through research and treatment, outcomes have improved significantly over the past 20 years.

Continued research is essential for further advances in these diseases, which can be life-threatening.

About the Vasculitis Foundation

The Vasculitis Foundation (VF) is the largest international patient support group for people with vasculitis.

Through its website, newsletter, brochures, informational materials, medical consultants, symposia and chapters, VF raises awareness and educates its patients, family members and friends.



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www.VasculitisFoundation.org

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