



ANEMIA, HEMOLYTIC



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An anemia that is due to red blood cells being destroyed faster than the bone marrow can produce them. In the intrinsic type, the destruction is due to a defect in the red blood cells themselves. In the extrinsic type, healthy red blood cells are produced, but are destroyed in the spleen. Hemolytic anemia can affect all ages.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sometime there are no symptoms. The anemia may be diagnosed on a routine health exam.
- Fatigue and weakness.
- Pale skin, eyes, and fingernails.
- Shortness of breath.
- Irregular heartbeat.
- Jaundice (yellow skin and eyes, dark urine).

CAUSES

Bone marrow cannot produce red blood cells fast enough to make up for those being destroyed. This is a process known as hemolysis. More than 200 causes for hemolysis exist. Some are due to inherited disorders and some are acquired disorders. Sometimes, the cause is unknown.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Inherited disorders. These include hereditary spherocytosis, glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency, sickle-cell anemia, or thalassemia.
- Infections such as hepatitis, cytomegalovirus, Epstein-Barr virus, typhoid fever, *streptococcus*, or *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*).
- Leukemia or lymphoma.
- Use of certain drugs, such as penicillin, antimalarials, sulfa, or acetaminophen.
- Various tumors.
- Family history of hemolytic anemia.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't take any drugs that have previously caused hemolytic anemia.
- Seek genetic counseling before having children if you have a family history of hemolytic anemia (inherited forms).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- If hemolytic anemia is acquired, it can usually be cured when the cause, such as a drug, is stopped.
- If it is due to an underlying disorder, the outcome depends on the course of the primary disease.

- If hemolytic anemia is inherited, it is currently considered incurable. However, symptoms can be relieved or controlled.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Varies depending on the cause of the anemia.
- It may cause existing heart or lung disease to worsen.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms. Medical tests include blood and urine studies. Other tests may be done to help diagnose an underlying cause for anemia.
- Treatment depends on the specific hemolytic problem. Treatment may include drugs, blood transfusions, stopping drugs, or surgery.
- Blood transfusion therapy may be needed.
- Surgical removal of the spleen may be recommended.

MEDICATIONS

- Drugs will be prescribed depending on the specific cause of anemia. These may include corticosteroids, immune globulin, folic acid, iron therapy, and others.
- Drugs that are causing the anemia will be stopped.

ACTIVITY

No limits, except those caused by the symptoms.

DIET

No special diet. Fava beans should be avoided in certain patients (you will be advised).



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of hemolytic anemia.
- Fever, cough, sore throat, swollen joints, muscle aches, or bloody urine occur during treatment.
- Signs of infection in any part of the body (redness, pain, swelling, fever).
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.