

Polymyositis

Polymyositis is a muscle disease causing weakness in all of the skeletal muscles, which are responsible for movement. Poly-myo-sitis literally means multiple muscle inflammation. The muscle fibres become under attack from the body's immune system, with white blood cells creating inflammation in the muscle fibres. This persistent inflammatory disease can occur at any age, but it tends to affect adults in their 30s, 40s and 50s the most. Black people are more commonly affected than white people, while women are more affected than men. The signs and symptoms of the disease tend to develop gradually, over several weeks, if not months.

Remissions are rare in this condition. Treatment can help to improve your function and muscle strength. However, the condition can be progressive. Also, like other inflammatory conditions, it can flare up and die down and go through cycles of up and down, with some weeks being better and some weeks worse.

The most common symptoms are muscle weakness and muscle atrophy (the muscle shrinking in size). Patients can also feel tired, have weight loss, morning stiffness or just a general feeling of discomfort. However the cause is unknown although some believe it may be genetic. Diagnosis is usually done by a physical examination, checking muscle strength of the muscles in the limbs, and then blood tests for muscle enzymes. Electrical nerve stimulation (EMG) will likely be tested on the muscles to check the conduction of the muscles. Ultimately, polymyositis may be confirmed by muscle biopsy.

If polymyositis is associated with a skin rash, it may be referred to as dermatomyositis.

Polymyositis Anatomy

The muscular system controls the movement in the human body. Attached to the bones that make up the skeletal system, there are roughly 640 muscles that compose half of the individual's body weight. Each one of these muscles is a discrete organ constructed of blood vessels, tendons, muscle tissue and nerves. Muscle tissue is also found on the inside of the heart, the digestive organs and the blood vessels. In any of these organs, the muscles work to move substances throughout the entire body.

Most of the skeletal muscles are attached to two different bones using tendons. The tendons are a tough band of connective tissue with strong collagen fibers firmly attaching the bones to the muscles. Tendons are under a lot of stress when the muscles are pulling on them, so they are quite strong and are woven into the bone and muscle coverings.

How to Treat Polymyositis:

1. Physical Therapy

Physical therapists can show you a number of different exercises to help improve and maintain flexibility and strength, as well as give advice on what an appropriate activity level is for your condition. Working with a therapist will help reduce pain and improve activities of daily living.

2. Dietetic Assessment

In the early stages, eating the right foods can be helpful. Maintain a balanced nutritious diet, low in pro-inflammatory foods, and high in fish oils and anti-inflammatory foods. Later stages of the disease, swallowing and chewing often become difficult. Registered dieticians can teach you the proper means of preparing foods that are easy to eat.

3. Speech Therapy

If the swallowing muscles become weak, speech therapy will help you learn how to compensate for the upcoming changes.

4. Corticosteroids

For the majority of people, the first line of treatment is taking a corticosteroid medication. These medications work to suppress the immune system, which limits the production of antibodies and helps to reduce muscle inflammation, as well as improve function and muscle strength. The most commonly prescribed oral steroid is prednisolone. In low dosages for short periods of time, side-effects are very minimal if at all, but over longer periods the effects of taking steroids on the body build up and you should discuss this with your doctor. However, in reality there may be little option as steroids are one of the most effective ways to reduce the symptoms.

You might be prescribed with a higher dose in the beginning. It will be decreased as the symptoms and signs get better. Improvement often takes anywhere from two to four weeks, but you might need to take the medication for several months at a time. It is common to be prescribed oral steroids for rheumatic and inflammatory conditions.

Tips:

- Know everything you can about your illness. Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Be a part of the medical team. Consider everyone involved as a united front working to fight your disease. Make sure to adhere to the treatment plan provided.
- Know what your limits are and when to say no.
- Rest whenever you start to feel tired. Don't wait until you hit the point of exhaustion to do something about it.
- When dealing with an illness, acknowledge your emotions. Stay close to friends and family during this rough time.