

Difficult to talk about?



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Priapism



This issue may be embarrassing or hard to talk about. But it happens to many men or boys with sickle cell disease. Talking about it with a doctor may help you understand what is happening if or when it happens to you.

Talk with your doctor or other medical professional. Help us to find other treatments.

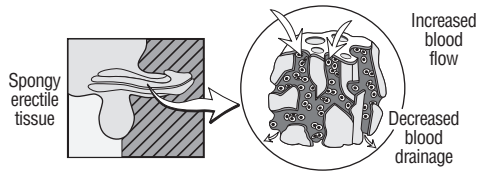
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and Sickle Cell Disease Questions & Answers

Priapism

What is priapism?

Priapism is a prolonged, unwanted, painful erection of the penis. Priapism can be very painful.



How is it caused?

Erections occur when there is increased blood flow into the penis and decreased blood flow out of the penis. The penis is erect when it fills up with blood.

In people with sickle cell disease, red blood cells are stiff and take on a half moon or sickle shape. These sickle shaped blood cells do not flow easily through the blood vessels and may become stuck blocking the vessel. This is the cause of all sickle cell crises. When drainage of the blood out of the penis is blocked by sickled cells, a specific kind of painful crisis occurs called priapism.

When can it happen?

Priapism is like any other type of painful crisis. It can occur at any time. It is usually not possible to predict or prevent priapism. Episodes may begin in early childhood or at any time in life. Priapism usually occurs without other complications of sickle cell disease but it can follow chest syndrome or other events.

Priapism events may begin during sleep or during everyday activities. Use of cocaine or other street drugs may cause an episode of priapism. Episodes are not usually associated with sexual feelings or activity.

Are there different types of priapism?

There are two different kinds of priapism. They differ in how long they last and how long they are treated.

• Stuttering Priapism

Stuttering episodes last 30 minutes to 2 hours and then go away, or come and go over several hours or days. The penis may ache or feel heavy but the erection does not last more than 2 hours at a time. To relieve the pain and help the priapism to end sooner, you may want to:

- drink lots of fluids and pass urine
- take a warm bath or shower
- walk around or gently exercise
- distract yourself by reading, watching television or listening to relaxing music
- use medicine for pain such as opioids like acetaminophen with codeine

Report stuttering priapism episodes to your doctor, especially if they happen more than once. Medications may prevent these events.

• Prolonged Priapism

Prolonged episodes last for longer than 2 hours. They may require immediate medical attention. Any episode of priapism that prevents passing of urine is also a medical emergency. If all the treatments listed above have been tried and the episode lasts longer than 2 hours, it must be treated at the Emergency Department. Treatment to end a prolonged episode may be medicines given by mouth, under the skin or in a vein. These medications work best if patients are treated within 4 hours of the start of the episode.

Priapism episodes that do not end within 4 to 24 hours may cause permanent damage or scarring inside the penis. This can lead to impotence.



What does the future hold?

There is no proven effective treatment for priapism. If episodes happen frequently, a specialist in sickle cell disease or in conditions related to the urinary tract or penis may discuss medication to prevent episodes returning.

We are currently trying to learn more about who is affected by determining how many boys and men with sickle cell disease have priapism. Our next step will be a trial to see if certain medicine given by mouth to those with frequent priapism will prevent future episodes.

If priapism lasts for more than 2 hours, seek medical attention immediately.