Sarcoidosis



What is sarcoidosis?

Sarcoidosis is an immune system disorder that can attack any organ of the body. However, it most frequently starts in the lungs and lymph nodes, particularly those in the chest cavity. Sarcoidosis is characterized by the presence of small (microscopic) areas or lumps of inflamed cells called granulomas. The granulomas can grow and form larger clusters within an organ and may affect the function of that organ. Granulomas can be found inside the body, for example, on the walls of the bronchi and bronchioles (breathing tubes) in the lungs. They can also appear as sores on the skin. Sarcoidosis also affects the eyes and liver and less often, the spleen, nerves, heart, brain, salivary glands, tear glands, bones and joints.

What are the symptoms of sarcoidosis?

Sarcoidosis causes a variety of symptoms or no symptoms at all. It is not contagious. Symptoms vary depending on which organs are affected. For example, patients suffering from pulmonary sarcoidosis may have a persistent dry cough, shortness of breath, wheezing, and chest pain. There also can be fatigue, weakness and weight loss. For those cases where the disease appears outside the lungs, symptoms can include general discomfort, loss of appetite and/or loss of weight, fever, painful joints, scaly rashes, and disfiguring sores on the nose, cheeks, and ears. Sarcoidosis can also affect the eyes without causing any symptoms. When eye symptoms do occur, they may include eye pain, blurred vision, severe redness, and sensitivity to light.

How is sarcoidosis recognized?

The diagnosis of sarcoidosis is based on the patient’s medical history, physical examinations, laboratory tests, lung function studies, chest x-rays, CT scans, and eye exams. The diagnosis is confirmed by eliminating other diseases having similar symptoms and performing a biopsy on any of the affected organs. Sarcoidosis is not a type of cancer.

How common is it?

Sarcoidosis usually occurs between the ages of 20 to 40 years. People of African-American and Scandinavian descent are more likely to have sarcoidosis.

It affects both men and women but studies show it is more likely to occur in women. People with a family history of sarcoidosis are more likely to develop the disease.

What is the treatment for sarcoidosis?

Many patients recover completely without treatment. When therapy is recommended, drugs are used to reduce the inflammation or to suppress the immune system.

Should sarcoidosis be an occupational concern?

The link between sarcoidosis and work has not been established. According to Regulatos, the cause of sarcoidosis is not known. Regulators also states that “Some people may have a genetic predisposition to developing the disease, which may be triggered by bacteria, viruses, dust or chemicals.”

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