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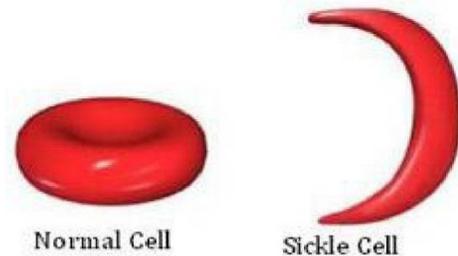
Being Sickle Cell Smart

What is sickle cell disease?

Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) is a blood disorder that people are born with. It affects how red blood cells (RBCs) form. For people with SCD, the way the red blood cells are shaped can cause painful symptoms and, in some cases, long-term health problems.

What is different about SCD red blood cells?

Normal RBCs are round and flexible. Sickled cells are stiff and inflexible. They can cluster and block blood flow. When this blood flow is blocked, it can cause damage to blood vessels, bones, and other organs. This can also cause pain and other longer-term problems.



Sickled cells do not last as long as normal RBCs and your body has trouble replacing them fast enough. Because of this, you may not have enough RBCs. The extra energy your body uses to cope with this and making blood cells quickly can cause you to feel very tired.

How can your health providers help?

There are many things that can be done to help prevent or control pain, stroke, and chest and breathing problems. In addition to taking good care of yourself, your doctor may recommend medication(s) and/or blood transfusions.

Is there a cure for SCD?

Currently, the only known cure for sickle cell disease is bone marrow or stem cell transplant. Bone marrow is the soft tissue inside the bones that makes blood cells.

A bone marrow transplant is a procedure that takes healthy bone marrow cells from a person who does not have sickle cell disease (the donor) and gives them to the person who has sickle cell disease (the recipient) to replace the bone marrow that is making sickle cells.

Bone marrow transplantation is an option for some people under the right circumstances. For the transplant to work, the bone marrow must come from someone who is a close match, usually a healthy sibling who has the same set of parents as the child with sickle cell disease.

Although it is not a cure, the medicine *Hydroxyurea*, can help your body make more of the healthy shaped RBCs and decrease both short and long-term problems associated with SCD. Pain medication is often used too.

Ask to talk to your health care provider for more information about what is right for you.