

Sarcoidosis

What Is It?

Sarcoidosis (sar-koyd-osis) is a restrictive lung disease that affects approximately 20 out of 100,000 people in the United States. It most commonly is seen among black women ages 20-40, however, anyone can get it. It can appear in almost any body organ, but most often starts in the lungs or lymph nodes. The cause of sarcoidosis is unknown. It is thought that sarcoidosis of the lungs begins with alveolitis (inflammation or swelling of the alveoli). Alveoli are the tiny air sacs in the lungs where carbon dioxide and oxygen are exchanged. Alveolitis either clears up by itself or leads to granuloma formation. Granulomas are small lumps in tissue caused by healing of inflamed areas. Eventually fibrosis (scarring) can form, causing the lung to stiffen and make breathing harder.

Shortness of breath and dry cough that won't go away can be among the first symptoms of sarcoidosis. Other general symptoms can include weight loss, fatigue, weakness, chest tightness, night sweats, fever, or just an overall feeling of ill health.

What Medicines Are Used To Treat Sarcoidosis?

How Do I Take Them?

- **Steroids** are the most common drugs used to treat inflammation when it occurs. Steroids can be given in either pill or inhaler form.
- **Oxygen** therapy may be prescribed if your lungs are unable to absorb enough oxygen when you breathe in. Your doctor will determine if you need oxygen during your visit with him/her.

How Will This Affect My Life?

There is no cure for sarcoidosis, but it can be managed. Steroid treatment may be needed for several years. Symptoms usually improve with steroids, but can return when medication is stopped. Symptoms vary according to the organ(s) that are affected. For those with lung involvement, oxygen may be needed depending on how much of the lung is scarred. Shortness of breath will usually progress and worsen with minimal activity and even at rest. In severe cases, lung transplant may be an option.

When Do I Call The Doctor?

- Report early signs of infection:
 - increased shortness of breath
 - increased cough
 - increased mucus production
 - mucus that is yellow, green or tan in color
 - fever of 101.5 or higher or chills

What Can I Do To Stay Well?

- Seek treatment early for lung infections to prevent further damage to your lungs.
- Get a flu shot every year. Ask your doctor about the pneumonia vaccine. Having a lung disease means you are more likely to “catch” cold or infection.
- Stay out of crowds, especially in the winter when people have colds and flu.
- Take your medications as your doctor prescribes. Tell your doctor when a medicine is not working for you so he/she can make adjustments.
- Exercise regularly. Ask your doctor about a Pulmonary Rehabilitation program near you. As a Rehab participant, you can become more physically fit and learn ways to better manage your lung disease.
- Join your local Better Breathers Club sponsored by the American Lung Association for group support.
- If you are on oxygen, be sure to use it as prescribed by your doctor to prevent complications.