

## Sarcoidosis

In sarcoidosis swollen nodules or lumps grow in different parts of the body. This happens most often in the lungs, lymph nodes, eyes, skin, liver or spleen.

Anyone can get sarcoidosis, but it is more common in women between the ages of 20-40 than in men. In North America, blacks seem to get it more often than whites, but this is not the case in other countries. It is important to understand that sarcoidosis is not contagious. People who have it cannot give it to others. It is not cancer. Most people will get better on their own. But, a few will go on to have chronic lung, heart or kidney problems. People with sarcoidosis can usually keep on working.

### What Causes It?

The cause of sarcoidosis is not known. It may be that people with sarcoidosis have a problem in their immune system that makes them more likely to get the disease. Doctors think that inhaling something in the environment causes the immune system to start making the swollen nodules as a way of getting the toxin out of the body.

The swollen nodules are not harmful. But, they can cause problems in the way that organs, like the lungs, lymph nodes, eyes or liver usually work.

### What Are The Symptoms?

When sarcoidosis is in the lungs, there are often no symptoms at all. A doctor may see it on a chest x-ray that was taken for another reason. However, shortness of breath, cough, chest pain or a sense of heaviness in the chest may be signs of sarcoidosis. Rash, joint pain, enlarged lymph glands or sore eyes are other symptoms.

For most people, sarcoidosis usually goes away on its own. This may take a couple of years. Other people may need treatment if the sarcoidosis is in organs such as the lungs, eyes, heart or kidneys. Treatment may be necessary for several months or longer. Because there are a few people who go onto to develop chronic problems, it is very important that people be followed by a specialist.

### How Is Sarcoidosis Diagnosed?

When sarcoidosis is in the lungs, it shows up on a chest x-ray. Further tests including breathing tests, blood tests and a cardiogram are usually ordered. A CT-scan may also be helpful. In some cases, a bronchoscopy may be done to biopsy the lung and confirm the diagnosis.

### How Is It Treated?

There is no real cure for sarcoidosis. Usually, it has to run its course. This may take several years. Remember that most cases of sarcoidosis heal on their own anyway. Sometimes, if the sarcoidosis is causing people to have trouble breathing or if they cough a lot, a doctor will prescribe a cortisone-like medication such as Prednisone. These drugs are good because they help stop swelling and melt away the nodules. Cortisone drugs sometimes cause side-effects like a puffy face or stomach trouble. But, these side-effects go away. And, it is more important to stop the damage the Sarcoidosis may be causing.

### Can It Be Prevented?

No one really knows what causes sarcoidosis, so there is no way to tell who will or won't get it. Scientists are researching the disease. Someday it will be possible to prevent and cure the disease.