

Muscle inflammation

Inflammatory myopathies is a group of diseases that inflame one's muscle fibres, or tissues, making the muscle weak. It is a kind of immunity disorder, in which the body's white blood cells attack its blood vessels, muscle fibres, or skin. The three main types of inflammatory myopathies are myositis, polymyositis, and inclusion body myositis. The first two are more common.

Symptoms of dermatomyositis and polymyositis generally include progressive weakening of the muscle which starts in the muscles nearest to the trunk of the body. A distinctive symptom of dermatomyositis is rash on one's eyelids or finger joints. The inflammation damages the muscle fibres, causing it to become weak. Some sufferers may experience difficulty swallowing solids or liquids. This may lead to their coming down with pneumonia, or having difficulty breathing due to their weakening respiratory muscles.

Blood tests, electromyography and muscle biopsy can help diagnose these disorders. Once diagnosed, patients should undergo checks for cancer because there may be troublesome tumours in the body. In some cases, the tumours may be so small during the early stages of the disorder that they are hard to detect. Patients should have a long period of follow-up monitoring even after the initial course of treatment has been completed.

Most patients show initial improvement to corticosteroid therapy. Taking large doses of steroid can help to relieve the symptoms. Other immunosuppressant drugs such as azathioprine, methotrexate, cyclosporine and cyclophosphamide, and immunomodulatory treatment such as intravenous immunoglobulins may reduce inflammation in patients who do not respond well to steroid, or who require bigger doses of steroid.