

Sickle cells: How can



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Over all, the life expectancy of people with sickle cell disease has improved over the years. With improved healthcare, people can now live long into adulthood.

The transition from paediatric to adult care has exposed people with sickle cell disease to a number of challenges which the public healthcare system was not prepared for. For many years, sickle cell disease was a disease that affected infants, so little attention was given to managing it in adults. Those who now graduate from paediatric to adult healthcare face a number of challenges.

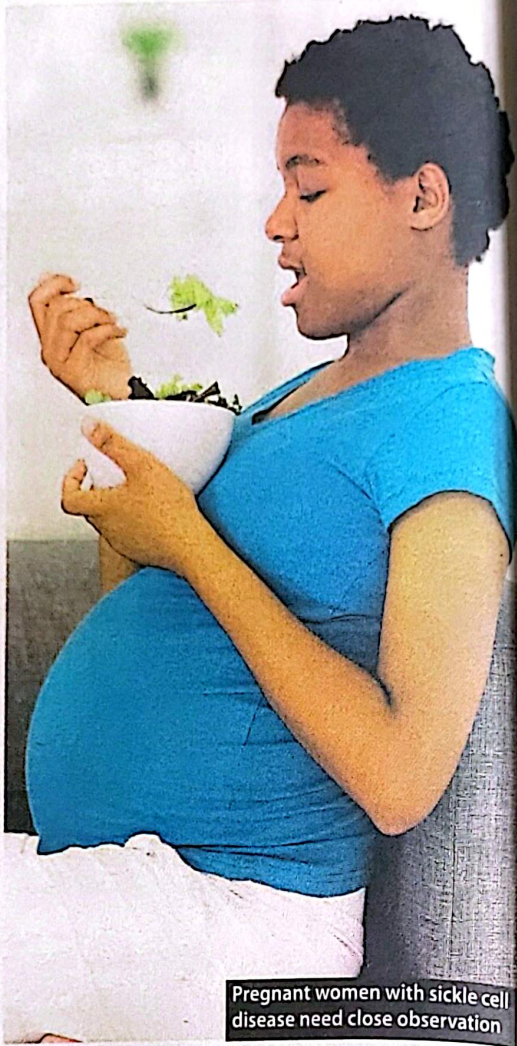
Historically, medical treatment projects and policy formulation have rarely taken into account the reproductive health expectations of people with sickle cell disease.

Effect on adults
Adults with sickle cell disease are at serious risk in a crisis that has been brewing for decades.

They get sicker than other adults. They are victims of cultural-socio-economic stigma.

They are reluctant to interact with reproductive health professionals and when they finally do, they face barriers to information and care.

Reproductive health
The reproductive healthcare of a person with sickle cell disease is an essential component of building a complete and inclusive healthcare system and achieving optimal overall health.



Pregnant women with sickle cell disease need close observation

However, there is an increasing crisis in the health and well being of people with sickle cell disease because they lack information to make an informed decision hence making them vulnerable. Unlike other groups of people with chronic diseases who receive appropriate reproductive information such as people living with HIV, sickle cell patients do not have the opportunity to receive the information they need. Reproductive health

information is not a 'one-size-fits all, so each class of people has to receive information suitable for them. There are a number of reproductive health issues affecting people with sickle cell disease, including the following.

Menstruation
Girls with sickle cell disease always have delayed menstruation periods compared to others. If a reproductive health educator does not pass on this information to these girls,

women cope?

they will be affected as they may think they are abnormal.

Many girls with sickle cell disease have over a year of delayed menses.

The frustration and long waiting causes trauma and psychological torture.

Although the onset of menses is delayed in females with sickle cell disease, menstrual bleeding patterns are normal.

An unfortunate feature of menstrual bleeding in women with sickle cell disease is its association with an increased sickle cell-related pain rates.

Increased sickle cell-related pain occurs at different stages of the menstrual cycle.

In people with sickle cell the red blood cells have a lifespan of 10-20 days compared to those without sickle cell, which last for 120 days in the body.

The body has to struggle and manufacture blood. On top of these losses, the monthly menses also deprives them of healthy blood cells.

This means menstruation in some people brings pain. It is more common among people with sickle cells to prepare themselves for the pain to come.

For a number of women, when that period of the month approaches, they have to either stock painkillers or get ready for hospitalisation.

It feels awkward to wait for pain which you have no control over. "I spend five days a month in pain due to my periods," one woman says.

The woman has to struggle for five days a month in pain until the period ends. This translates into 60 days of pain annually. This discounts other crises.

For women with sickle cell disease, monthly pain should not be an item on your menu. You can always overcome the pain by eating a balanced diet and investing in using blood boosters.

The writer is the head of Action Against Sickle Cell Disease



Girls with sickle cell disease get delayed menses causing them frustration

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