

Nutrition important for sicklers

Individuals with sickle cell anaemia may suffer from painful episodes that can occur suddenly and last for days. Proper nutrition is part of a healthy lifestyle that is necessary for vital health and disease management.

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Sickle cell anaemia is a genetic red blood cell disorder that causes blood cells to take on a sickle shape. Sickled red blood cells are destroyed more quickly in circulation and may also block flow in blood vessels, causing tissue damage and pain.

According to Ruth Mukiibi, the executive director Sickle cell Association of Uganda, sicklers often experience episodes of pain, fatigue and frequent infections which sometimes require hospitalisation. However, if managed well, the per-

son or child may not develop these complications in a very long time.

Sickle Cell Disease is associated with low calcium intake, vitamin D deficiency and poor appetite and these can lead to delayed growth and development among children. The parents or caretakers must therefore, ensure proper feeding.

Calcium is effective at building strong bones but this alone is not enough. The sick person needs Vitamin D as well. "Many sickle cell disease patients are Vitamin D deficient due to their darker skin and this is worsened by lack of dairy intake and limited sun exposure," says Mukiibi. Calcium and Vitamin

OTHER PRECAUTIONS

Ruth Mukiibi, the executive director Sickle cell Association of Uganda, says a sickler should avoid getting cold or wet since these can cause painful crises. These are usually worsened by a wet skin so ensure that the body is dry all the time. Like cold weather, hot weather and dehydration are also known triggers for pain crises.

Appointments

Mukiibi also says one should keep appointments regularly (every three months), get all the regular immunisations and take extra vitamins such as folic acid.

Beware of fevers as these may be serious and need medical attention. Whenever the child develops a fever, make sure it is treated from hospital because it may be worsened by a painful crisis which is hard to manage from home.

Ensure to avoid stress, not to over exercise and watch out for any pain in the chest that worsens on deep breathing. Also watch out for cough, deep jaundice especially if the eyes and an increase in anaemia. For all these symptoms, Mukiibi advises the patient to get immediate medical attention.

D are important for your child's growth and development, but good overall nutrition is essential. Speak with your healthcare specialist for a full assessment. Meanwhile, keep these tips in mind to maximise your child's nutrition:

Feeding

To manage the disease, forego sugar or sweetened drinks and instead take milk or orange juice. It is important that a family with a sickler makes good nutrition a family affair so that the child does not feel punished or left out.

"Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables paired with grains, proteins such as eggs, fish, chicken, lean meat, beans, nuts and low-fat dairy. Get plenty of calcium-rich foods such as low-fat milk, yoghurt, leafy green vegetables and calcium-fortified foods such as soymilk and orange juice."

A person suffering from sickle cell anaemia needs plenty of Vitamin D and can get it from the sun or eggs,

milk and yoghurt. Water is also important and the sickler should be encouraged to drink plenty of it to prevent constipation and dehydration.

