Dermatomyositis

Dermatomyositis is an acquired muscle disease called *inflammatory myopathies*. The disease, which has a gradual beginning, affects both children and adults. Females are more often affected than males.

SYMPTOMS

- The most common symptom is muscle weakness, usually affecting those muscles that are closest to the trunk of the body. Eventually, patients have problems rising from a sitting position, climbing stairs, lifting objects, or reaching overhead. The muscle weakness is usually accompanied by pain and swelling.
- A rash is often seen before the muscle weakness occurs. The rash is bluish-purple patches on the face, neck, shoulders, upper chest, elbows, knees, knuckles, and back. There may be swelling of the face and eyelids. The rash may be itchy.
- Hardened bumps of calcium deposits under the skin, especially in children. Trouble with swallowing, talking and breathing may occur.
- Occasionally, the muscles ache and are tender to touch.
- Patients may also feel fatigue and discomfort and have weight loss or a low-grade fever.
- In some cases, muscles not close to the body may be affected later in the course of the disease.

TREATMENT

One treatment is a steroid called prednisone. For patients in whom prednisone is not effective, other drugs which suppress the immune system may be prescribed. Recently, the part of the blood that fights disease (*immunoglobulin*) was shown to be effective in treatment. Physical therapy is usually advised to preserve muscles and avoid the thinning of muscles (*atrophy*).

PROGNOSIS

Most cases respond to therapy. The disease is usually more severe and resistant to therapy in patients with heart or lung problems.

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