Rasmussen's Encephalitis

Rasmussen's encephalitis is a rare progressive neurological disorder. It affects a single brain hemisphere. Generally, it occurs in children under the age of 10.

SYMPTOMS

Problems include:

- Frequent and severe seizures.
- Loss of motor skills and speech.
- Paralysis on one side of the body (*hemiparesis*).
- Inflammation of the brain (*encephalitis*).
- Dementia.
- Mental deterioration.

TREATMENT

When seizures have not spontaneously improved by the time hemiplegia and aphasia are complete, the standard treatment for this disorder is surgery. This is to remove or disconnect the affected part of the brain. It is called a hemispherectomy. Anti-epileptic drugs may be prescribed at first. But they are usually not effective in controlling the seizures. Alternative treatments may include:

- Removal and reinfusion of blood plasma. (This is called *plasmapheresis*.)
- High fat, low carbohydrate diet. (This is a *ketogenic diet*.)
- Steroids.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

The outcome for individuals with this disorder varies. Untreated, the disorder may lead to severe neurological deficits. This includes mental retardation and paralysis. In some patients, surgery decreases seizures. But most patients are left with some paralysis and speech deficits.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS supports and conducts studies. These are aimed at understanding neurological conditions that can damage the brain. This includes Rasmussen's encephalitis. The goals of these studies are to find ways to prevent and treat these disorders.

Research is continually being done to learn more about this problem.

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