Whipple's Disease

Whipple's disease is a multi-system infectious bacterial disease. It interferes with the body's ability to metabolize fats. The disorder can affect any system in the body, including the central nervous system. But it usually occurs in the gastrointestinal system.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may include:

- Diarrhea.
- Intestinal bleeding.
- Abdominal pain.
- Loss of appetite.
- Joint soreness.
- Weight loss.
- Fatigue and weakness.
- Fever.
- Arthritis.
- Cough.

Arthritis and fever often occur several years before intestinal symptoms develop. Patients may experience neurological symptoms as well. These may include:

- Abnormalities of eye and facial muscle movements.
- Confusion.
- Seizures.
- Ataxia.
- Memory loss.
- Vision impairment.

TREATMENT

Whipple's disease is treated with antibiotics. This is to destroy the bacteria that cause the disease. Your caregiver may use a number of different types, doses, and schedules of antibiotics to find the best treatment. Depending on how serious the disease is, treatment may also include fluid and electrolyte replacement. Electrolytes are salts and other substances in body fluid. The heart and brain need them in order to work well. Extra iron, folate, vitamin D, calcium, and magnesium may also be given to help compensate for the vitamins and minerals the body can not absorb on its own.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

Generally, antibiotic treatment to destroy the bacteria that caused the disease results in relief of symptoms. But the disorder may persist despite sustained treatment with antibiotics. Relapses happen often. With treatment, the disorder can be cured. Untreated, this disease is fatal.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS supports research on disorders that affect the central nervous system. This includes Whipple's disease. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases also supports research on disorders such as Whipple's disease. Much of this research is aimed at learning more about these disorders and finding ways to prevent, treat, and ultimately, cure them.

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

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