Subacute Sclerosing Panencephalitis

Subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (SSPE) is a fatal nervous system disease. It is a virus. It can occurs anywhere from 2 to 10 years after the original measles illness. Wide spread use of the measles vaccine has made this disease rare.

CAUSES

The SSPE virus remains in the nervous system in an inactive state after a measles infection. Years later, for unknown reasons, the virus becomes active and starts to attack the nervous system. This is called a slow virus infection.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of SSPE show up 7 to 10 years after an infection with measles. Symptoms usually come in stages.

Stage 1:

- Changes in personality.
- Odd behavior.
- Poor school or work performance.
- Drowsiness.

Stage 2:

- Worsening dementia.
- Muscle weakness.
- Loss of sensation.
- Seizures (*convulsions*).

Stage 3 and 4:

- Body function problems.
- Coma.
- Death.

The time it takes to move through the stages of SSPE is usually from 1 to 3 years. It may be quicker or slower. Rarely the disease improves spontaneously.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of SSPE is made by lab testing.

TREATMENT

There is no cure for SSPE at this time. Research is being done for medicines to treat SSPE. Treatment is mainly aimed at controlling symptoms. Good nursing care is eventually needed to help with feeding and making the person comfortable.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Treatment at home depends on the stage of the disease. This will be directed by your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- New problems or concerns

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