POLYARTERITIS NODOSA

WHAT IS POLYARTERITIS NODOSA (PAN)?

Polyarteritis nodosa (PAN) is a rare disease that results from blood vessel inflammation ("vasculitis") causing injury to organ systems. The areas most commonly affected by PAN include the nerves, intestinal tract, heart, and joints. PAN can also affect the blood vessels to the kidney resulting in high blood pressure and reduced kidney function.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms include fever, fatigue, weakness, loss of appetite, and weight loss. Muscle and joint aches are common. The skin may show rashes, ulcers, and lumps.

Other symptoms include abdominal pain and gastrointestinal bleeding (occasionally is mistaken for inflammatory bowel disease). Nerve involvement may cause sensory changes with numbness, pain, burning, and weakness. Central nervous system involvement may cause strokes or seizures. Kidney involvement can produce varying degrees of renal failure. Involvement of the arteries of the heart may cause a heart attack, heart failure, and inflammation of the sack around the heart (pericarditis).

TREATMENT

Treatment will vary based on patient symptoms, disease activity, organ involvement and lab test results. Medications that suppress the immune system (immunosuppressives) form the foundation of treatment for PAN. There are a variety of immunosuppressive medications that are used in PAN. People with PAN who have critical organ system involvement are generally treated with a corticosteroid such as prednisone combined with another immunosuppressive medication such as cyclophosphamide (Cytoxan).

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