



ALLERGY & ASTHMA AFFILIATES

IS IT JUST AN INFECTION?

Do the same symptoms keep coming back or never seem to completely clear? Is the infection severe enough to require hospitalization or intravenous antibiotics? Is there a family history of early infant death or of susceptibility to infection?

If you answered yes to any of these questions it is critical to get an early diagnosis and proper medical care - don't hesitate to ask your physician to check for the possibility of a primary immunodeficiency disease.

PRIMARY IMMUNE DEFICIENCY

Primary immunodeficiency diseases occur in persons born with an immune system that is either absent or hampered in its ability to function. And while the diseases may differ, they all share one common feature: each results from a defect in one of the functions of the body's normal immune system. Because one of the most important functions of the normal immune system is to protect us against infection, patients with primary immunodeficiency diseases commonly have an increased susceptibility to infection.

Common Variable Immunodeficiency (CVID) is a group of 20 to 30 primary immune deficiency disorders characterized by low levels of specific immunoglobulins or antibodies produced by the immune system to fight infections or disease.

In CVID, frequent bacterial infections may occur in the skin, the sinuses, the throat, the ears, the lungs, the brain or spinal cord, or in the urinary or intestinal tracts, and the increased vulnerability to infection may include repeated infections, infections that won't clear up or unusually severe infections. People with primary immunodeficiency diseases live their entire lives more susceptible to infections--enduring recurrent health problems and often developing serious and debilitating illnesses. Patients may experience an enlarged spleen and lymph nodes. Gastrointestinal problems also may occur, due to the malabsorption of fat or certain sugars or a parasitic infection. Some patients develop autoantibodies that attack and destroy blood cells. Finally, patients may have an increased risk of cancer, especially those of the lymphatic system, skin and gastrointestinal tract.

Fortunately, with proper medical care, many patients live full and independent lives. Intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) replacement therapy is the standard of care and only effective treatment for most patients with primary immunodeficiency disease. With good medical care, people with CVID usually have a normal life span. They do as well or better as people in the same age group with normal immune systems. The aim of the treatment is to keep the patient free of infections and to prevent the development of chronic lung disease. The outlook for patients with CVID depends on how much damage has occurred to their lungs or other organs before diagnosis and treatment with gamma globulin therapy and how successfully infections can be prevented in the future by using gamma globulin and antibiotic therapy.

Please contact the Immune Deficiency Foundation with any questions you may have about primary immunodeficiency disease through idf@primaryimmune.org or call 1-800-296-4433.

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Horizons Infusion Center offers flexible hours available to assist in your scheduling needs including evenings and Saturdays. IVIG replacement therapy is ordered by the physician, and administered and managed by a team of registered nurses and nurse practitioners.