

What is Acromegaly?

About 3 to 14 of every 100,000 people have been diagnosed with acromegaly.

1 Introduction

Acromegaly is a hormonal disorder that develops when the pituitary gland produces too much growth hormone during adulthood. This disorder affects the bones, cartilage, organs and other tissues in the body, causing them to increase in size and grow in irregular ways. Since the physical changes occur slowly, other health problems, such as high blood pressure and colon polyps, may develop before acromegaly can be diagnosed and treated.

2 Causes

Most cases of acromegaly are caused by a tumor in the pituitary gland, called a pituitary adenoma, which produces excessive amounts of growth hormone. In other rare cases, acromegaly can be caused by nonpituitary tumors located in other parts of the body, like the lungs or pancreas. Some of these tumors make growth hormones themselves, but they often produce a hormone that signals the pituitary gland to make more growth hormone.

3 Symptoms

Symptoms tend to vary from person to person, but some of the more common physical symptoms are:

- Enlarged hands or feet
- Changes in face shape, including a more prominent jaw and/or forehead
- Increase in the size of lips, nose or tongue
- Excessive sweating or oily skin
- Deepening of the voice
- Joint pain

Other symptoms — including headaches and vision problems — may be caused by the tumor pressing against other parts of the brain.

4 Treatments

Treatment for acromegaly depends on the symptoms and aims to accomplish the following goals:

- Reduce growth hormone production to normal levels
- Relieve pressure a tumor may be putting on surrounding tissues
- Treat any hormone deficiencies
- Improve symptoms

The most common types of treatment are surgery, medication and radiation therapy.

Did you know?

When Acromegaly develops before the end of puberty, it is known as “Gigantism”.

For more information on acromegaly and supportive resources, please visit niddk.nih.gov.

References:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/acromegaly/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20351226>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/acromegaly/>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/17743-acromegaly>