

Understanding Spondyloarthropathies

The frequency of ankylosing spondylitis in the U.S. is 0.5%

1 Introduction

Spondyloarthropathies is the name for a diverse family of chronic joint disorders. This group includes ankylosing spondylitis, reactive arthritis, psoriatic arthritis and joint problems linked to inflammatory bowel disease (enteropathic arthritis). The most common type is ankylosing spondylitis.

Spondyloarthropathies differ from other types of arthritis because it involves the sites where ligaments and tendons are attached, called entheses.

2 Causes

Though the exact cause of spondyloarthropathies is unknown, the presence of a particular gene, HLA-B27, is often associated with the disease. Having this gene does not guarantee that the person will develop any of these conditions. Spondyloarthropathies are more likely to be hereditary than other forms of rheumatic disease.

3 Symptoms

The main symptom of this condition is back pain, but each type has specific symptoms:

- Ankylosing spondylitis — stiffness and lower back pain that can travel to the upper back over time. In severe cases, the affected joints in the back fuse together.
- Reactive arthritis — pain and inflammation in the sacroiliac joint, fingers, toes and feet.
- Psoriatic arthritis — associated with psoriasis and affects large joints, including the hips and lower back. Swelling of the fingers and toes also occurs
- Enteropathic arthritis — spinal arthritis that also involves inflammation of the intestinal wall. The arthritis typically affects knees, hips, ankle and elbow joints.

4 Treatments

In some cases, spondyloarthropathies can go undiagnosed for years. Treatment is usually focused on relieving pain and stiffness through spinal exercises in combination with anti-inflammatory medications.

Did you know?

Males in their teens and 20s are diagnosed 2 to 3 times more often than females.

For more information on Spondyloarthropathies and supportive resources, please visit rheumatology.org.

References:

- https://www.hss.edu/condition-list_spondyloarthritis-spondyloarthropathy.asp
- <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2004/0615/p2853.html>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK459356/>
- <https://www.arthritis.org/diseases/spondyloarthritis>
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