
IgA Vasculitis (HENOCH-SCHÖNLEIN) Factsheet

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About a week after the rash you may get tummy aches that come and go. Diarrhoea, vomiting and bleeding from the bowel can occur.

Occasionally, the condition can involve other areas of the body and complications can develop. This can include inflammation of the kidney (nephritis) and there can be bleeding into the lungs. In boys the testicles can become inflamed (orchitis). Very rarely, inflammation of the heart can lead to a heart attack and involvement of the brain can cause fits.

How is IgA vasculitis diagnosed?

It is usually possible to suspect Henoch-Schönlein purpura from your symptoms and the appearance of the rash. However you may be asked to have some tests to confirm the diagnosis, to rule out other causes and to check whether complications have developed. These may include:

- Blood tests: A test of to see whether your kidneys have been affected, signs of group A streptococcal infection, a check of your platelet count (platelets are part of the blood clotting system and a low count can be another cause of purpura) and the level of immunoglobulin A.
- Skin biopsy: A small sample of skin affected by the rash is taken and examined under a microscope.
- Urine test: This is another way of checking whether the kidneys have been involved.
- Other tests: If you develop complications, you may need checks to make sure they are not due to other causes. They can include a biopsy of the kidney, stool tests, and scans.

What is the treatment for IgA vasculitis?

The chances are that you will get better without treatment. However, if you have bad pains in the joints you may need painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen. Paracetamol is better than ibuprofen if you also have complications such as kidney inflammation, diarrhoea or vomiting. Resting with your legs raised reduces pressure in the blood vessels and helps the rash to clear up quicker. If you do get kidney inflammation, joint pains or tummy pain, you may require steroid medicine. If your blood pressure goes up as a result of your kidneys becoming involved, medicine to lower this may also be necessary.

Does IgA vasculitis get better?

Most people get completely better in about four weeks. Sometimes another episode can occur, months or even years after the original attack.

Occasionally, if the kidneys become inflamed, long-term problems can occur, especially if there is a delay in recognising that this complication has developed.

It is rare for other parts of the body (such as the heart or lungs) to become involved but when they do the outcome can be very serious. Complications are more likely in older children and adults.

Further reading

Watson L, et al (2012) Henoch Schonlein Purpura – A 5th Year Review and Proposed Pathway, PLOS One, 2012.

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