

MANAGING YOUR ACROMEGALY

What Is Acromegaly?

Acromegaly is an illness in which some soft skin and bones of the head, face, hands, and feet can grow out of proportion to the rest of your body. Acromegaly is rare; only about 750 people per year are diagnosed with it in the U.S. However, 10 to 20 times as many people currently live with it.

Acromegaly usually occurs in middle-aged adults who finished growing in height but then other body parts start growing. Children can also have acromegaly.

What Causes Acromegaly?

This illness is caused by production of too much growth hormone made by the body's pituitary gland. This gland makes too much growth hormone because of a benign (not cancer) tumor, or growth. This tumor usually occurs in the same part of the brain as the pituitary gland.

What Are the Symptoms of Acromegaly?

Enlargement of bones of the hands, feet, head, or face is a common symptom. Others include headaches, blurred vision, joint pain, numbness and tingling of the fingers, high blood pressure, carpal tunnel syndrome (numbness of fingers), high blood sugar (glucose) level, changes in a woman's periods (menstrual cycle), impotence in men, and excess growth of skin on the forehead, jaw, lips, and tongue. Snoring and space between the teeth may increase, and the voice may get deeper. Acromegaly may also cause arthritis, heart disease, and sleep apnea.

How Is Acromegaly Diagnosed?

The health care provider will perform a physical examination and do blood tests to measure the amount of growth hormone.

An MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) or CT (computed tomography) scan of the pituitary gland will be done to find the tumor.

How Is Acromegaly Treated?

Early diagnosis and treatment of overproduction of growth hormone are needed to prevent acromegaly.

Surgery may be done to remove the tumor. Surgery is done by reaching the tumor in the pituitary gland through the nose or above the lip, so no scarring occurs.

Radiation to the pituitary gland and medicine are other treatments. Often, a combination of all these methods is used.

The health care provider may suggest seeing an endocrinologist, a health care provider who treats hormone problems.

Acromegaly requires lifelong treatment. Surgery often succeeds, but hormone levels may not return to normal, and medicines may be needed even after surgery.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Acromegaly

- ✓ **DO** follow your doctor's recommendations about medicines.
- ✓ **DO** see your health care provider regularly. Your health care provider will check your blood pressure, blood sugar level, and heart to monitor for complications of this disease. Your eyes should also be checked regularly.
- ✓ **DO** contact your health care provider if you have vision changes, worsening headaches, or get new nerve pains or numbness, or pain or pressure in the chest.

✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have side effects from your medicines, including nausea, dizziness, or lightheadedness.

⊗ **DON'T** expect all your symptoms to go away immediately.

⊗ **DON'T** be afraid to try a combination of treatments.

⊗ **DON'T** forget to have your eyes examined.

FROM THE DESK OF

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- Pituitary Network Association: Post Office Box 1958 Thousand Oaks, CA 91358; Tel: (805) 499-9973; Website: <http://www.pituitary.com>

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