

MANAGING YOUR RHABDOMYOLYSIS

What Is Rhabdomyolysis?

Rhabdomyolysis is a condition that occurs when muscle is damaged. This damage releases the pigment myoglobin from muscle into the blood. Kidneys normally filter the pigment out of the blood. Substances from the muscle breakdown may harm the kidneys by blocking their filtering structures. The kidneys fail and release toxic waste products into the blood.

What Causes Rhabdomyolysis?

Causes include crushing injuries to muscle, seizures, and exercise-related heatstroke. Other causes are severe frostbite, severe burns, drug overdose, cocaine use and side effects of medicines such as statins (used to treat high cholesterol). Sometimes, too much high endurance exercise by someone who isn't trained enough can cause excessive muscle breakdown and rhabdomyolysis. People with alcohol abuse have a much higher risk of rhabdomyolysis due to the effects of alcohol and frequent falls in alcoholics.

What Are the Symptoms of Rhabdomyolysis?

The main symptoms are muscle pains and red or brown urine that may then turn into less urine or no urine being produced. This serious sign of being unable to urinate, a symptom of kidney failure, means that immediate medical care is needed. Other symptoms are fatigue, lethargy, joint pain, extreme thirst, and fast or irregular heartbeat.

How Is Rhabdomyolysis Diagnosed?

The health care provider will make a diagnosis from the medical history, physical examination, and laboratory tests. Blood studies will show poor kidney function, high potassium levels, and

other abnormalities of body fluids. Urine may be red or brown because of pigments and dehydration.

How Is Rhabdomyolysis Treated?

Treatment takes place in the hospital. Intravenous fluids are first given to keep a steady urine flow. This treatment is helpful to flush pigments through the kidneys. Medicines may be given to change the acidity of the urine, to make the urine alkaline, and to increase urination. This also flushes pigments out of the kidneys.

The main adverse effect of this treatment is fluid overload if kidneys already started to fail before treatment. In this case, dialysis (kidney machine) may be needed to remove fluid and wastes and to rest the kidneys until they can recover. Several days to weeks may be needed, depending on how severe the problem is.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Rhabdomyolysis

- ✓ **DO** get medical care right away if you see red or brown urine or have general muscle aches, if you had one of the causes of rhabdomyolysis, especially a crushing muscle injury or exercise-related heatstroke.
- ✓ **DO** also get medical care if after you had treatment for rhabdomyolysis you see colored urine or decrease in urine output. Get immediate medical care if you cannot urinate.
- ✓ **DO** stay well hydrated and drink plenty of fluids.
- ✓ **DO** stop using alcohol or drugs that may have contributed to your condition. Find a program that can help you with your alcohol problem.

⊗ **DON'T** let yourself become dehydrated if you are at risk of having rhabdomyolysis.

Being dehydrated may let pigments build up in the kidney. This is especially important if you had exercise-induced heatstroke, because you're already dehydrated.

⊗ **DON'T** take part in high endurance sports without having had the proper training.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American College of Emergency Physicians: Tel: (800) 798-1822; Website:
<http://www.acep.org>
- American Association of Kidney Patients: Tel: (800) 749-2257; Website: www.aakp.org

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