

Spondyloarthritis (SpA)

Terminology

SpA or spondyloarthropathy is the name for a family of diseases that cause arthritis.

- Ankylosing spondylitis, affects mainly the spine and is the most common form.
- Axial SpA, affects mainly the spine and hip joints.
- Reactive arthritis affects the heels, toes, fingers, low back, and joints.
- Psoriatic arthritis may affect the skin, joints, or both.
- Arthritis in the gut is associated with inflammatory bowel disease.

What is SpA?

- SpA is different from other types of arthritis because it involves the ligaments and tendons attached to bones.
- The most common symptom is pain and stiffness in the spine, but the hands and feet, or arms and legs may also be stiff.
- You may also have bone damage causing changes to the spine, shoulders, and hips.

What causes SpA?

- This is an inherited disease that has been linked to several genes. The major gene that causes this disease is HLA-B27.
- The disease tends to start in the teens and 20s and more common in males than females.

How is SpA diagnosed?

- A doctor reviews your medical history and does a physical exam.
- X-rays of your joints will be done to look at the present joint damage.
- X-ray changes of the hip joints are a key sign of SpA.
- Blood tests may also be completed to look for the HLA-B27 gene.

Fast facts

- Low back pain is a common symptom. This occurs most often in arthritis involving the spine.
- Some patients have the main symptom of pain and swelling in the arms and legs.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) offer symptom relief for most patients. Other medications called anti-TNF Blockers help prevent the disease from getting worse.

How is SpA treated?

- Physical therapy and specific exercises are recommended.
- First line treatments are NSAIDs such as naproxen, ibuprofen, meloxicam, or indomethacin to help with pain relief.
- Second line treatments are DMARDs and Biologics. These medications help decrease symptoms and prevent further damage to the joints.

Points to remember

- SpA is a type of arthritis that attacks the spine and the joints of the arms and legs.
- People in their teens and 20s, particularly males, are affected most often.
- Family members of those with SpA are at higher risk.

For additional information

- Spondylitis Association of America – **www.spondylitis.org**
- National Psoriasis Foundation – **www.psoriasis.org**
- The Arthritis Foundation – **www.arthritis.org**
- The Rheumatology Research Foundation – **www.rheumatology.org/Foundation**