

Behçet's Disease & You

What is it?



Behçet's (pronounced bay-sets) is a serious but very rare disease that causes inflammation of blood vessels. It belongs to a family of diseases called "vasculitis" that involve inflammation of the arteries. What makes Behçet's different is that it can affect both arteries and veins. It can also affect vessels of any size.

The cause of Behçet's disease is unknown at this time, but it is thought to be an auto-inflammatory disease. The theory is that something in the environment triggers inflammation in people who have the right mix of genes.



Behçet's disease is like a fire in your arteries and veins

The word inflammation comes from the Latin word *inflammare* which means to light on fire. You can think of Behçet's like a fire in your blood vessels. Putting out the fire of Behçet's early is important. You want to get that fire out as quickly as possible so it doesn't cause damage. Once the damage from Behçet's is done it cannot be reversed.

Treating Behçet's aggressively is also essential. Using the same fire analogy, we've called in the fire department. Now we need to make sure we have the right tools to put out the fire. We don't want a bucket and water. We want a fire truck with a big hose. The faster we can get that fire out the less damage is done and the better things will be in the long run.

What is it going to do to me?



The first symptoms of Behçet's disease are often similar to the flu. You might start feeling unwell and notice a fever, achiness, and weight loss. Because these symptoms are not specific, it can be difficult to diagnose Behçet's disease in the early stages.

The most common symptom of Behçet's disease is frequent and recurring sores in the mouth and on the genitals. The eyes can also become inflamed, a condition called iritis or uveitis. The joints can also become warm and swollen (arthritis). Finally, skin rashes are also common and can look like acne.

Other symptoms of Behçet's depend on which blood vessels are affected. If arteries supplying the lungs are involved, you may notice shortness of breath, a cough, or chest pain. If the veins are involved, there is a risk of developing blood clots.

Behçet's disease less frequently affects the nerves, gastrointestinal system (stomach & bowels), the kidneys and the heart.

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RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about Behçet's and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.

What can I do about it?



Behçet's is a very serious illness. While there is no cure, many people respond well to therapy. Behçet's is a disease that tends to flare. This means you may have periods where your symptoms are well controlled and other times they flare up again.

If you have Behçet's disease, your family doctor should refer you to a specialist immediately. A rheumatologist is one of the best people to help you manage your condition.

People with Behçet's disease can lead active and productive lives with the right kinds of treatment. Your treatment will be tailored for you depending on your symptoms. Whatever treatment approach is chosen, it is essential to treat Behçet's early and aggressively.

Topical medications are often used for mouth or genital sores as well as skin rashes. If these do not work, oral medications may be needed. If the eyes are affected, steroid drops and dilating drops will be prescribed.

Swollen joints may be treated with NSAIDs or other oral therapies. Prednisone is used for any serious organ involvement including vascular disease. Often combinations of medicines are used for serious organ involvement.

Here are some other recommendations on what you should do:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Attend your rheumatologist appointments regularly**
- **Get your blood tests regularly as suggested by your rheumatologist**
- **Learn about the medications used to treat Behçet's disease**