

Diffuse Idiopathic Skeletal Hyperostosis & You

What is it?



Diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis (also known as "DISH") is a disease that results in bone growth along the ligaments of the spine. For some reason, bone-building cells lay down calcium in areas where they shouldn't.

Calcification or excess bone growth can occur throughout the body wherever tendons and ligaments insert into the bone. This process can cause pain and stiffness.

The exact cause of DISH is uncertain. It's a rare disease, but it can run in families. The most likely scenario is that both genetics and the environment play a role in causing DISH.

DISH is very rare in people under the age of 40. It most commonly occurs in older men.



DISH can feel like Medusa slowly turning you to stone

In Greek mythology, Medusa was a beautiful goddess whose silky hair turned into snakes. She was feared for her ability to turn men into stone when they looked into her eyes. If you have DISH, you might feel a little bit like you're looking into the eyes of Medusa. Over time, the ligaments of the spine and sometimes the shoulders, elbows and knees become calcified where they insert into bone, causing stiffness and pain that can make it difficult to move around.

What is it going to do to me?



Pain and stiffness are the most common symptoms of DISH. It can take a long time for DISH to develop, and some people may live with the stiffness for many years before being diagnosed.

The pain from DISH can eventually be extreme. Pain usually occurs along the spine, anywhere from the neck down to the lower back. Pain is sometimes worse in the morning, but it usually doesn't go away throughout the day. If the neck is involved, bone growth can cause pressure on other structures that sometimes makes it difficult to swallow or breathe. Pain and tenderness can also occur throughout other parts of the body, such as in the Achilles tendon, the feet, the knee cap or the shoulder joint.

Patients with DISH may experience fatigue, difficulty sleeping and sometimes depression.

Visit RheumInfo.com



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

What can I do about it?



If you have DISH or think you may have it, you should see your family doctor. In some cases, your family doctor might refer you to a rheumatologist, an expert in treating arthritis and inflammatory disorders.

People with DISH can lead active and productive lives with the right kind of treatment. The goal is to help keep the joints moving smoothly to decrease joint pain and prevent limitations in mobility and functioning.

Medications for DISH are usually geared towards pain control. Non-prescription pain relievers such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) are often the first treatment approach. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can also be used to help relieve pain and stiffness.

When over-the-counter medications are not enough to control pain caused by DISH, stronger medicines called opioids may be used.

Physical therapy, exercise and moderate stretching are an important part of an overall treatment plan for DISH. They can improve the pain and stiffness in your joints and help protect them by strengthening the surrounding muscles. Exercise can also reduce fatigue.

Here are some other recommendations:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Attend your medical appointments regularly**
- **Learn to protect your joints from further damage**
- **Learn about the medications used to treat DISH**