

What is it?



This pamphlet will discuss Polymyositis (PM) and dermatomyositis (DM). These are diseases that cause inflammation in the muscles. They are chronic (long-term) diseases that lead to muscle weakness, but not usually pain or swelling. To keep things simple, we'll refer to both PM and DM simply as myositis. People with myositis develop weakness in the muscles around the shoulders and hips. However, other muscles in the body can also become weak.

The cause of myositis is unknown at this time, but it is thought to be an autoimmune disease. This means that something triggers your immune system to go awry. It begins to attack the muscles, leading to weakness.



Myositis is like a fire in your muscles

The word inflammation comes from the Latin word *inflammare* which means to light on fire. You can think of myositis like a fire in your muscles. Putting out the fire of myositis early is important. You want to get that fire out as quickly as possible so it doesn't cause damage.

Treating myositis 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?



One of the first things people with myositis notice is fatigue. It can take time before muscle weakness becomes noticeable. You might start to have trouble getting up from a chair, climbing the stairs or lifting things above your head. When myositis is more severe, it can cause problems with things like swallowing. This is serious because it can cause a person to choke or breathe things into their lungs.

Inflammation can occur in other parts of the body such as the joints. This can lead to pain and stiffness in the joints. It can also occur in the lungs causing shortness of breath. Rarely, it can occur in the heart muscle or the muscles that help you breathe.

Some people with myositis may notice weight loss, swelling around the eyes, or the hands turning white in the cold (Raynaud's Phenomenon).

People with dermatomyositis also get a rash. The rash is usually found on the backs of the hands over the knuckles and on the face, shoulders and chest. The rash can occur up to 1 year before the start of muscle weakness.

Visit RheumInfo.com



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

What can I do about it?



People with myositis can lead active and productive lives with the right kinds of treatment. It is essential to treat myositis early and aggressively. Myositis is a very serious condition, especially if really important muscles that control breathing, the heart, and swallowing are affected. If you have myositis, your family doctor should refer you to a rheumatologist right away. A rheumatologist is one of the best people to help you manage your condition.

Prednisone is the main medication used to treat myositis. It works by helping to control the immune system's attack on the muscles. You may also be prescribed other medications such as methotrexate or azathioprine (Imuran) in addition to prednisone. A drug called intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) is sometimes used in people with severe myositis.

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 doctor**
- **Learn about the medications used to treat myositis**