

# Complications: Pain & Dactylitis

## What is sickle cell pain?

Pain episodes are a common complication of sickle cell disease and varies with each person. Some children might have often while others may have not at all. Painful episodes can last anywhere from a few hours to several weeks and in some cases requires a hospital admission to control the pain.

## What causes sickle cell pain?

Pain episodes are caused by sickled cells that get stuck in blood vessels and block blood flow. **When blood flow is blocked, certain areas of the body do not get enough oxygen, causing pain.**

Sickle cell pain most often occurs in the arms, legs, chest, back, and abdomen.

## What is dactylitis?

Children and infants with sickle cell disease may first experience pain as dactylitis (DAK-TIH-LY-TUS) or Hand-Foot Syndrome. This happens when sickle cells cause the hands and feet to become inflamed. **Dactylitis is usually painful and can last from several hours to several days.**

## How do I know if my child has dactylitis?

- Their hands or feet may appear puffy.
- Infants may be fussy or cry when you touch their hands or feet.
- Older children may complain of pain or pressure in their hands and feet.
- Your child may not want to reach for or hold items.



## What should I do if my child has pain or dactylitis?

- Make sure they drink plenty of liquids.
- Have your child rest until the pain improves.
- Apply heat where the pain is located using a warm pack or a warm, wet washcloth.
- Give your child pain medication **ONLY** as directed by your child's provider.
- For severe pain, your child may need to go to the hospital for IV fluids and pain medication.

## How can I help prevent pain and dactylitis?

- Make sure your child drinks plenty of fluids and gets plenty of rest.
- Avoid letting your child become too hot or too cold.
- Avoid people who have infections.

### KNOW THE SIGNS OF PAIN & DACTYLITIS:

- severe pain in the abdomen
- a fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher
- pain that cannot be controlled at home
- trouble breathing

If your child has any of the above symptoms, **seek care and call** the sickle cell nurse or doctor:

**312-227-4813 (M-F 9am to 5pm)**

**312-227-4000 (After hours, ask for hematologist on call)**

### The Comprehensive Sickle Cell Program

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