

Home

The home environment should always be nurturing and supportive because this may help to decrease the frequency of pain episodes and illness. It is important to keep the house well ventilated and comfortably warm. This will stimulate better oxygenation of the lungs and promote better circulation of the blood. Family members should make sure that direct cold air flow from fans and air conditioners is not focused on the family member with sickle cell disease because cold temperatures will cause constriction of the blood vessels. Constriction results in slowing the blood flow and clogging the sickle red blood cells which can cause pain. The individual with sickle cell disease should wear warm clothing such as a sweater or jacket if cold temperatures cannot be avoided.

It is very important for family members with sickle cell disease to eat at least three (3) nutritious meals daily. There are no special dietary needs for sickle cell disease. The primary medical caretaker will institute supplemental dietary plans as needed. Children with sickle cell disease should drink at least four glasses of water a day to keep their body well hydrated. Adults should drink at least eight glasses of water a day for the same reason. Citrus juices are diuretics (tending to increase the discharge of urine), and therefore may cause dehydration if there is not enough water intake.

Family members with sickle cell disease should be allowed to participate in ALL regular aspects of family life. Physical activities are encouraged because they stimulate circulation and promote blood flow. However, periods of rest should be encouraged. Most importantly, the person with sickle cell disease needs to set his or her own limits when trying various activities. Caution should be taken with some heavy activities such as moving heavy objects (furniture, machinery) and forced, prolonged sports activities that can cause exhaustion. Cleaning with caustic materials that have fumes should be avoided because they promote shallow respirations resulting in decrease oxygenation.

You can expect your family member with sickle cell disease to have a normal life.

However, there are often sudden attacks of pain that may arise with no warning. It is these times that they need your support and nurture the most. It is important that the family member experiencing the pain episode be made comfortable, warm, well hydrated, and allowed to rest. This type of support and attentiveness could mean the difference between a short-lived pain episode and a difficult pain crisis that leads to a hospital stay. It is important to remember that all pain may not be caused by sickle cell disease. Prolong, unusual, or severe pain warrants medical attention. Any sudden sharp pain should be considered an emergency. If a trip to a medical facility is necessary, someone should accompany the family member in pain because this will aid in lessening stress, and could help provide adequate history to aid the medical professional in their diagnosis.