

SÉZARY SYNDROME

What is Sézary Syndrome?

Sézary syndrome is a type of cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (CTCL). Other types of CTCL include mycosis fungoides (the most common type of CTCL), primary cutaneous anaplastic large cell lymphoma, lymphomatoid papulosis, and subcutaneous panniculitis-like T-cell lymphoma, to name a few. Most CTCLs typically fall into the category of indolent (i.e. chronic) lymphomas – treatable, but not curable and usually not life-threatening.

Sézary syndrome is a leukemic form of CTCL and distinguished from mycosis fungoides by the presence of cancerous lymphocytes in the blood. Most patients with Sézary syndrome have extensive red, itchy rash covering at least 80 percent of the body. In some cases, thicker, red patches (or plaques) and tumors may also appear. In addition, these symptoms may be accompanied by changes in the nails, hair, eyelids, and the presence of enlarged lymph nodes.

There are about 3,000 new cases of CTCL each year in the U.S. and approximately 15 percent of those are diagnosed as Sézary syndrome. Although Sézary syndrome can affect people of any age, Sézary syndrome is most common in adults ages 50 and over, and is slightly more common in men than women. There are no known risk factors for Sézary syndrome.

How Sézary Syndrome Is Diagnosed and Staged

Many of the same procedures may be used to diagnose and stage other types of cutaneous T-cell lymphomas are used in Sézary syndrome, including:

- A physical exam and history
- Blood tests, which may include a test called flow cytometry, to identify antigens, or markers, on the surface of the cells in the blood
- A skin and/or lymph node biopsy (removal of a small piece of tissue) for examination under the microscope by a pathologist (a doctor who studies tissues and cells to identify diseases)
- A series of imaging tests such as CT (computerized axial tomography), MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and/or PET (positron emission tomography) scans to determine if the cancer has spread to lymph nodes or other organs

Because Sézary syndrome is such a rare cancer, it is important to confirm the diagnosis by a dermatopathologist or a hematopathologist, a pathologist who is an expert in diagnosing lymphomas.

Sézary syndrome and mycosis fungoides (MF) are staged using the same system:

Stage IA

Less than ten percent of the skin is covered in red patches and/or plaques.

Stage IB

Ten percent or more of the skin surface is covered in patches and/or plaques.

Stage IIA

Any amount of the skin surface is covered with patches and/or plaques; lymph nodes are enlarged, but the cancer has not spread to them.

Stage IIB

One or more tumors are found on the skin; lymph nodes may be enlarged, but the cancer has not spread to them.

Stage III

Nearly all of the skin is reddened and may have patches, plaques or tumors; lymph nodes may be enlarged, but the cancer has not spread to them.

Stage IV A

Most of the skin area may be reddened and there is involvement of the blood with malignant cells or any amount of the skin surface may be covered with patches, plaques or tumors; cancer has spread to the lymph nodes and the lymph nodes may be enlarged.

Stage IV B

Most of the skin is reddened or any amount of the skin surface is covered with patches, plaques or tumors; cancer has spread to other organs; and lymph nodes may be enlarged whether cancer has spread to them or not.

By definition, patients with Sézary syndrome are stage IV A or IV B because of involvement of lymphoma in the blood.

How Sézary Syndrome is Treated

The treatment of Sézary syndrome is continuously evolving and improving. At any one time, there are numerous clinical trials ongoing to determine newer and better treatments. It's important to discuss clinical trials with your care provider.

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) is an alliance of the world's leading cancer centers, and is dedicated to improving the of care provided to patients



with cancer. NCCN institutions and experts work together to provide and maintain up to date guidelines for the care of patients with MF and Sézary syndrome. Selecting the right treatment or combination of treatments for you can be daunting, and it's important to work with a specialist who has experience treating patients with Sézary syndrome.

There are many effective therapies available to treat Sézary syndrome.

Because the disease is chronic and systemic (affecting the entire body), Sézary syndrome is usually not treated with skin-directed therapies alone. The specific treatment for individual patients is based on a variety of factors, including the patient's general health and stage of the disease.

Common therapies include:

- Biologic therapy, or immunotherapy, is a treatment used to stimulate a patient's own immune system to fight the cancer
- Chemotherapy, a drug given either orally or through an infusion in a vein, to stop the growth of rapidly dividing cancer cells
- Extracorporeal photopheresis (ECP), a procedure used to expose the blood to ultraviolet light
- Histone deacetylase inhibitors, a class of drugs that cause a chemical change that stops tumor cells from dividing
- Phototherapy, for example, the drug psoralen and ultraviolet-A light radiation (PUVA) directed to the skin or skin-directed ultraviolet-B (UVB) or narrow band ultraviolet-B (NBUVB)
- Radiation therapy, which uses high-energy X-rays or other types of radiation to kill cancer cells or keep them from growing
- Retinoids, which are drugs related to vitamin A and can slow certain types of cancer cells

Currently, the only treatment aimed at cure rather than remission is stem cell transplant (SCT) therapy. Candidates for stem cell transplant should have excellent disease control prior to undergoing the transplant. Preparation for SCT involves using drugs and radiation to eliminate the patient's current immune system prior to engrafting a new donor immune system. The hope is that the new immune system is better able to fight Sézary.

Information on Sezary Syndrome and other cutaneous lymphomas and treatment options, including more detailed information on particular drug treatments, is available at www.clfoundation.org.

What is the Prognosis for Sézary Syndrome?

Sézary syndrome can be an aggressive type of cutaneous lymphoma. Seeing an experienced physician and starting therapy are important to ensure the best control of your symptoms and the best possible prognosis.

Are Complementary and Alternative Therapies Safe and Effective?

Complementary and alternative medicines are nonstandard therapies that may help patients cope with their cancer and its treatment, but should not be used in place of standard treatment. No alternative therapy has ever been proven effective against lymphoma. Complementary therapies such as meditation, yoga, acupuncture, exercise, diet and relaxation techniques have been shown to be effective in combating some treatment side effects. Before embarking on any complementary therapies, patients should discuss the matter with their healthcare team. Certain unproven treatments, including some herbal supplements, can interfere with standard lymphoma treatments or may cause serious side effects.

How to Prepare for Follow-up Treatments

It is important for patients both during and after treatment to be proactive in their healthcare, including keeping a master file of medical records, asking questions, reporting new symptoms, exercising and eating a balanced diet. In addition, patients who smoke should strongly consider stopping. Follow-up visits for people with Sézary syndrome often depends on the stage of the disease and treatment and can range from as frequently as every few weeks when starting new therapies that require monitoring to as little as every six months.

Typically, follow-up visits include physical examinations, blood tests and occasionally imaging tests such as CT or PET scans. Besides determining disease recurrence, follow-up care can help identify and resolve unusual side effects of treatment.

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