

# Sickle Cell Anemia

Authored by  
**mohammad looti**

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## RECOMMENDED CITATION

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Sickle Cell Anemia, also known as Hemoglobin S or SS disease, is mainly characterized by having insufficient red blood cells (RBC) for the body's oxygen supply. The normal RBC is flexible and circle-shaped but people with this inherited condition have a significant number of RBCs which are rigid and sickle or crescent-moon-shaped. Such abnormally shaped cells can slow down or block oxygen and blood flow as they can get stuck in blood vessels.

The symptoms may differ from patient to patient; the general symptoms include anemia, periodic pain, swelling of the hands and feet, recurrent infections, vision problems, delayed growth, and abdominal swelling. Complications include organ damage, stroke, acute chest syndrome, blindness, leg ulcers, gallstones, priapism, and pulmonary hypertension. For a child to inherit this syndrome, both parents need to have passed on the recessive sickle cell gene. Cases most often involve people of Black American descent. Interestingly, having sickle cell anemia provides its victim with a natural, but not yet well understood, immunity to malaria. It is probably for this reason that this painful (and sometimes fatal) condition selected itself into the equatorial African population.

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