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Commentary

Causes, Symptoms and Management of Marfan Syndrome

Leena Shanlee*

Department of Genetics, University of California, Los Angeles, California, USA

DESCRIPTION

Marfan syndrome is a rare genetic disorder that affects the connective tissues in the body. Named after Antoine Marfan, the French pediatrician who first described the condition in 1896, this syndrome can have a profound impact on various organ systems. In this article, we will discuss the causes, symptoms, and management of Marfan syndrome.

Causes

Marfan syndrome is primarily caused by a mutation in the FBN1 gene, which encodes fibrillin-1, a protein that plays a critical role in the formation of connective tissues. This genetic mutation leads to abnormal connective tissue formation, which affects the strength and elasticity of various tissues throughout the body, including the heart, blood vessels, bones, joints, and eyes. It is typically an autosomal dominant genetic disorder, which means that an affected individual has a 50% chance of passing the condition on to their offspring.

Symptoms

Cardiovascular complications: One of the most concerning aspects of Marfan syndrome is its impact on the cardiovascular system. Individuals with Marfan syndrome are at a higher risk of developing aortic aneurysms, which are weakened and bulging areas in the aorta, the body's largest artery. Aortic dissection, a life-threatening condition where the layers of the aorta separate, can occur if an aneurysm ruptures. To monitor and manage this risk, regular heart evaluations and imaging studies are essential.

Skeletal abnormalities: People with Marfan syndrome often have skeletal abnormalities, such as long limbs, fingers, and toes. They may also have a curved spine (scoliosis) or chest deformities, such as pectus excavatum (sunken chest) or pectus carinatum (protruding chest). These issues can lead to musculoskeletal problems, including joint pain and mobility difficulties.

Ocular involvement: The eyes are also affected in Marfan syndrome. Patients may experience nearsightedness (myopia) or other vision problems due to changes in the shape of the eye's lens. In some cases, the lens can dislocate, leading to more severe visual impairment. Routine eye exams are crucial for early detection and management.

Joint hypermobility: Many individuals with Marfan syndrome have hypermobile joints, which means their joints are more flexible than usual. While this can provide some advantages in activities like sports or dance, it can also result in joint pain, instability, and an increased risk of joint dislocations.

Management

Medical management: There is currently no cure for Marfan syndrome, but medical management aims to reduce the risk of complications and improve quality of life. Medications, such as beta-blockers, can help reduce the strain on the aorta and lower the risk of aortic dissection. Regular check-ups with cardiologists and ophthalmologists are essential for monitoring the condition.

Orthopedic care: Orthopedic interventions may be necessary to address skeletal issues associated with Marfan syndrome. This can include physical therapy, bracing, and in severe cases, surgical correction of spinal or chest deformities.

Lifestyle modifications: Individuals with Marfan syndrome are encouraged to lead a heart-healthy lifestyle, which includes regular exercise, a balanced diet, and avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. These lifestyle changes can help manage cardiovascular risks.

Genetic counseling: For individuals with Marfan syndrome who wish to have children, genetic counseling can provide valuable information about the risk of passing the condition to their offspring and assist in family planning decisions.

Marfan syndrome is a complex genetic disorder that affects multiple organ systems, necessitating lifelong medical monitoring and management. While there is no cure, advances in medical understanding and treatment have significantly improved the prognosis and quality of life for individuals with Marfan syndrome. With proper medical care, lifestyle modifications, and support, individuals with Marfan syndrome

Correspondence to: Leena Shanlee, Department of Genetics, University of California, Los Angeles, California, USA, E-mail: leena_s@usedu.com

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can lead fulfilling lives while managing the unique challenges posed by this condition. Early diagnosis and intervention are crucial for preventing life-threatening complications and ensuring the best possible outcomes for those affected by Marfan syndrome.