

Haemophilia

When you cut yourself, your body plugs up the wound with a blood clot. One of the essential factors used to form a blood clot - usually Factor VIII or IX - is missing in a person with haemophilia. This means they are prone to bleeding, especially internally.

Chronic pain and arthritis are common

Haemophilia can be either mild, moderate or severe, according to the level of clotting factor deficiency. The lack of clotting factor means that people with haemophilia tend to bleed internally into joints and muscles. This can lead to chronic pain and arthritis.

Haemophilia is an inherited condition

Haemophilia is rare. It affects approximately 1,600 Australians - mostly men. It is mainly a male disorder because the haemophilia gene is carried on the X chromosome. It is passed on by females who carry the haemophilia gene and by males who have haemophilia. In around 30 per cent of cases, the condition occurs through a gene mutation in either the mother or fetus. This means haemophilia can occur in any family.

Injections of clotting factor stop internal bleeding

Infusions (injections) of blood products are needed to stop internal bleeding. These infusions replace the missing clotting factor. They can be administered by a hospital that has an accredited haemophilia centre. Alternately, many people with haemophilia are taught to inject themselves at home.

Injured muscles and joints need protection

When people with haemophilia bleed into a muscle or joint, they also need to:

- Rest the injured area
- Apply ice packs to the affected area to reduce the swelling
- Wrap bandages around the affected area to further ease swelling
- Raise the injured limb, if possible.

Treatment practices have changed

Until recently, treatment involved infusions of blood products only after the bleeding had started. These infusions eased the pain, but couldn't stop the bleeding into joints. This means many men and boys with haemophilia have developed osteoarthritis, particularly in the hip, knee and ankle.

Now all children with severe haemophilia are given preventative treatment with infusions of blood products before they have a bleed. This may mean that many people with haemophilia won't develop arthritis in the future.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your nearest Haemophilia Centre
- Your State or Territory Haemophilia Foundation
- Haemophilia Foundation Australia Tel. 1800 807 173

Things to remember

- Haemophilia is an inherited condition that affects mainly males
- A person with haemophilia lacks one essential blood clotting factor.
- An injection of blood products provides the essential clotting factor to stop the internal bleeding.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Haemophilia Foundation Victoria

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.