

5 Tips for Managing Sickle Cell Crises

Rising Above the Pain, Inspiring Through the Journey

Empowering, supporting, and bringing hope to those living with sickle cell disease. You are not alone. Dedicated to amplifying the voices of warriors, fostering deep understanding, and providing a safe space where strength meets support. Every story matters.

A sickle cell vaso-occlusive crisis can be incredibly challenging, bringing sudden and severe pain. While medical intervention is vital, having a proactive, structured plan can help you or your loved one manage symptoms early and navigate the journey with resilience. Here are five foundational tips for managing a crisis.

1 Hydrate Intensely and Immediately

Dehydration causes red blood cells to stick and sickle more readily, worsening the blockages in blood vessels. At the very first sign of discomfort or a brewing crisis, significantly increase your fluid intake.

- Drink warm fluids (like herbal teas or warm water) which can assist in promoting blood circulation.
- Avoid ice-cold drinks, as sudden cold temperatures can cause blood vessels to constrict.
- Keep electrolyte-rich fluids on hand to maintain proper hydration balances.

2 Deploy Layered Pain Management Early

Do not wait for the pain to become severe before starting your management protocol. Intervening early can prevent the pain cycle from escalating out of control.

- Follow the individualized home-care pain plan prescribed by your hematologist strictly.
- Utilize over-the-counter or prescribed medications exactly as directed at the onset of a crisis.
- Keep a meticulous written or digital log of times and dosages to ensure safety and provide accurate data to doctors if hospitalized.

3

Utilize Safe and Soothing Heat Therapy

Heat helps dilate blood vessels, allowing sickled cells to flow more freely through small pathways and relieving localized muscle tension.

- Apply warm compresses, heating pads, or take a warm bath to soothe affected areas.
- **Crucial Caution:** Never apply ice or cold packs. Cold temperatures worsen sickling and can drastically escalate a pain crisis.
- Always check the temperature of heating elements to avoid accidental burns during periods of intense pain distraction.

4

Practice Deep Breathing & Mind-Body Calming

Severe pain naturally triggers anxiety and rapid, shallow breathing. This lowers oxygen levels in the blood, which induces further sickling and worsens the crisis.

- Practice slow, deep diaphragmatic breathing to maximize oxygen delivery to your tissues.
- Incorporate guided imagery, meditation, or soft, calming music to help distract the nervous system from intense pain signals.
- Create a quiet, low-stimulus environment to rest your body and reduce stress hormones.

5

Establish Your Individualized Crisis Protocol

When a severe crisis hits, thinking clearly can be difficult. Prepare your care toolkit and documentation ahead of time so it is entirely ready when needed.

Your Crisis Toolkit Checklist:

- An updated medical history sheet and an official hematologist care letter.
- Insurance information and a clear list of current daily and crisis medications.
- Emergency contact numbers for your primary hematology team.

WHEN TO SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION

Go to the nearest emergency room or call for emergency assistance immediately if you experience:

- A high fever (typically over 101°F or 38.3°C).
- Severe chest pain or sudden shortness of breath / difficulty breathing (Signs of Acute Chest Syndrome).
- Sudden weakness, numbness on one side of the body, slurred speech, or confusion (Signs of stroke).
- Sudden changes in vision or severe, unyielding headaches.
- Priapism (painful, prolonged erection lasting more than 2-4 hours).

This resource is brought to you by **Grace Above The Cell**.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational and educational purposes only and does not substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult your hematologist or healthcare provider regarding medical plans.