HUGHES APS TRUST

Management of joint problems in Antiphospholipid (Hughes') Syndrome (APS)

A guide for patients

Introduction

Antiphospholipid Syndrome (APS) is an autoimmune disorder where the immune system mistakenly attacks certain proteins in the blood, increasing the risk of blood clots. Besides vascular complications, APS can also lead to joint pain and inflammation. This leaflet provides information on managing these joint manifestations.

Joint Manifestations in APS

1. **Arthralgia**:
    - Joint pain without inflammation.
    - Can affect any joint but commonly involves the knees, wrists, and fingers.
2. **Arthritis**:
    - Joint pain with inflammation.
    - May cause swelling, redness, and reduced range of motion.
3. **Osteonecrosis**:
    - Death of bone tissue due to lack of blood supply.
    - Can lead to severe joint pain and disability, often affecting the hips and knees but potentially any bone
4. **Bone fractures**
    - Especially metatarsal fractures in the feet

General Management Strategies

1. **Regular Monitoring**:
    - Regular follow-ups with your healthcare provider.
    - Blood tests to monitor antiphospholipid antibody levels and overall health status.
2. **Medications**:
    - **Pain Relief**: Analgesics may include Paracetamol, narcotic or other analgesics to reduce pain.
    - **Anticoagulants**: Warfarin or heparin to prevent blood clots.
    - **Immunosuppressive Drugs**: Hydroxychloroquine, corticosteroids or other immune modulating therapies such as Methotrexate to manage inflammation.
    - **Bisphosphonates**: For patients with osteonecrosis to strengthen bones.
3. **Lifestyle Modifications**:
    - **Healthy Diet**: Rich in anti-inflammatory foods like fruits, vegetables, and omega-3 fatty acids.
    - **Regular Exercise**: Low-impact exercises like swimming, cycling, or walking to maintain joint flexibility and muscle strength.
    - **Weight Management**: Maintaining a healthy weight to reduce stress on joints.
    - **Smoking Cessation**: Smoking can exacerbate joint and vascular issues.

Specific Management of Joint Manifestations

1. **Arthralgia**:
    - **Heat and Cold Therapy**: Applying heat or cold packs to the affected joints to alleviate pain.
    - **Physical Therapy**: Exercises to maintain joint function and reduce pain.
    - **Assistive Devices**: Use of braces or splints if necessary to support the affected joints.
2. **Arthritis**:
    - **Medications**: Corticosteroids, or disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) as prescribed by your Rheumatologist.
    - **Physical Therapy**: Customized exercise programs to improve joint mobility and strength.
    - **Occupational Therapy**: Techniques to manage daily activities without overloading the joints.
3. **Osteonecrosis**:
    - **Early Detection**: Imaging tests including XRays and MRI scans for early detection and management.
    - **Medications**: Bisphosphonates or other bone-strengthening medications can reduce the impact of osteonecrosis
    - **Surgical Options**: In severe cases, procedures like core decompression or joint replacement might be necessary.

When to Seek Medical Attention

- Sudden, severe joint pain or swelling.
- Difficulty moving a joint.
- Signs of infection: increased redness, warmth, or fever.
- New or worsening symptoms despite treatment.

Support and Resources

- **Support Groups**:
- Lupus UK: https://lupusuk.org.uk
- **Patient Education Materials**:
- Versus Arthritis: https://versusarthritis.org
- British Society for Rheumatology https://www.rheumatology.org.uk
- **Specialists**: Rheumatologists, orthopaedic surgeons, and physical therapists can offer specialised care.

Conclusion

Managing joint manifestations in APS involves a combination of medical treatments, lifestyle changes, and regular monitoring. Collaborating with your healthcare team can help you effectively manage these symptoms and maintain a good quality of life.

Dr. Arvind Kaul on behalf of Hughes APS Trust 2024

This leaflet is provided for educational purposes and must not replace professional medical advice. Always consult your healthcare provider for personalised recommendations and treatments.