

CRYOGLOBULINEMIC VASCULITIS

WHAT IS CRYOGLOBULINEMIA?

Cryoglobulins are abnormal proteins in the blood. If you have cryoglobulinemia (kry-o-glob-u-lih-NEE-me-uh), these proteins may clump together at temperatures below 98.6 F (37 C). These gelatinous protein clumps can impede your blood circulation, which can damage your skin, joints, nerves and organs — particularly your kidneys and liver.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms usually come and go, and may include:

1. Skin lesions. Most people with cryoglobulinemia develop purplish skin lesions on their legs. In some cases, leg ulcers also occur.
2. Joint pain. Symptoms resembling rheumatoid arthritis are common in cryoglobulinemia.
3. Peripheral neuropathy. Cryoglobulinemia can damage the nerves at the tips of your fingers and toes, causing numbness and other problems.

TREATMENT

Cryoglobulinemic vasculitis may be treated with drugs that calm the immune system or fight viral infections. For severe symptoms, you may also have plasma exchange, a procedure that replaces the plasma in your blood with plasma from a donor or a different type of fluid.