ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome

Ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome is a rare condition that affects the part of the brain that coordinates movement (the cerebellum) and blood-forming cells in the bone marrow. The age when signs and symptoms begin, the severity of the condition, and the rate at which it worsens all vary among affected individuals.

People with ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome have neurological problems associated with a loss of tissue (atrophy) and other changes in the cerebellum. These problems include poor coordination and balance (ataxia), difficulty with movements that involve judging distance or scale (dysmetria), uncontrollable muscle contractions (clonus), and involuntary back-and-forth eye movements (nystagmus). These neurological issues worsen over time, making walking and other movements challenging. Some affected individuals eventually require wheelchair assistance.

Ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome also causes a shortage of one or more types of normal blood cells: red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. A shortage of all three of these cell types is known as pancytopenia. Pancytopenia can result in extreme tiredness (fatigue) due to low numbers of red blood cells (anemia), frequent infections due to low numbers of white blood cells (neutropenia), and abnormal bleeding due to low numbers of platelets (thrombocytopenia). Ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome is also associated with an increased risk of certain cancerous conditions of the blood, particularly myelodysplastic syndrome and acute myeloid leukemia.

Frequency

Ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome appears to be very rare. At least 25 affected individuals from four families have been described in the medical literature.

Genetic Changes

Ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome is caused by inherited mutations in the SAMD9L gene. The protein produced from this gene is involved in regulating the growth and division (proliferation) and maturation (differentiation) of cells, particularly cells in the bone marrow that give rise to blood cells. Studies suggest that the SAMD9L protein acts as a tumor suppressor, keeping cells from growing and dividing too rapidly or in an uncontrolled way. The SAMD9L protein also appears to play an important role in the brain, particularly the cerebellum, although less is known about the protein's function there.

The mutations that cause ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome are described as "gain-of-function." They increase the SAMD9L protein's ability to block cell growth and division. In the bone marrow, the resulting reduction in cell proliferation leads to a shortage of
red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. It is unclear how the effects of these mutations are related to ataxia and the other neurological problems associated with ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome.

It seems paradoxical that gain-of-function mutations in the *SAMD9L* gene, which enhance the protein's tumor suppressor function, could increase the risk of developing cancerous conditions such as myelodysplastic syndrome and acute myeloid leukemia. It appears that certain cells in the bone marrow with an inherited gain-of-function *SAMD9L* gene mutation can develop additional genetic changes that are associated with milder pancytopenia but an increased cancer risk. These changes include mutations that disable the *SAMD9L* gene ("loss-of-function" mutations) or a deletion of part of the long (q) arm of chromosome 7 that contains the *SAMD9L* gene. These additional changes compensate for the effects of the gain-of-function mutation in bone marrow cells. They prevent an overactive SAMD9L protein from excessively restricting cell proliferation, which reduces the severity of pancytopenia in affected individuals. However, a loss of the *SAMD9L* gene and other genes on the long arm of chromosome 7 may allow cells to grow and divide uncontrollably, leading to cancer. A deletion of the long arm of chromosome 7 is a well-known risk factor for myelodysplastic syndrome and leukemia.

**Inheritance Pattern**

This condition is inherited in an autosomal dominant pattern, which means one copy of the altered gene in each cell is sufficient to cause the disorder. In all reported cases, an affected person has had one parent with the condition.

**Other Names for This Condition**

- ATXPC
- myelocerebellar disorder

**Diagnosis & Management**

**Genetic Testing**

- Genetic Testing Registry: Myelocerebellar disorder

**Other Diagnosis and Management Resources**

- GeneReview: SAMD9L-Related Ataxia-Pancytopenia Syndrome
  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK435692
General Information from MedlinePlus

- Diagnostic Tests
  https://medlineplus.gov/diagnostictests.html
- Drug Therapy
  https://medlineplus.gov/drugtherapy.html
- Genetic Counseling
  https://medlineplus.gov/geneticcounseling.html
- Palliative Care
  https://medlineplus.gov/palliativecare.html
- Surgery and Rehabilitation
  https://medlineplus.gov/surgeryandrehabilitation.html

Additional Information & Resources

MedlinePlus

- Encyclopedia: Neutropenia - Infants
  https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007230.htm
- Encyclopedia: Thrombocytopenia
  https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000586.htm
- Health Topic: Anemia
  https://medlineplus.gov/anemia.html
- Health Topic: Bone Marrow Diseases
  https://medlineplus.gov/bonemarrowdiseases.html
- Health Topic: Cerebellar Disorders
  https://medlineplus.gov/cerebellardisorders.html
- Health Topic: Leukemia
  https://medlineplus.gov/leukemia.html
- Health Topic: Myelodysplastic Syndromes
  https://medlineplus.gov/myelodysplasticsyndromes.html

Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center

- Myelocerebellar disorder
  https://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/3865/myelocerebellar-disorder
Additional NIH Resources

- National Cancer Institute: Inherited Bone Marrow Failure Syndrome Study (IBMFS) https://marrowfailure.cancer.gov/
- National Cancer Institute: Myeloproliferative Neoplasms https://www.cancer.gov/types/myeloproliferative
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: Ataxia Information Page https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Ataxias-and-Cerebellar-or-Spinocerebellar-Degeneration-Information-Page

Educational Resources

- Disease InfoSearch: Myelocerebellar disorder http://www.diseaseinfosearch.org/Myelocerebellar+disorder/5018
- MalaCards: myelocerebellar disorder http://www.malacards.org/card/myelocerebellar_disorder
- Orphanet: Ataxia-pancytopenia syndrome http://www.orpha.net/consor/cgi-bin/OC_Exp.php?Lng=EN&Expert=2585

Patient Support and Advocacy Resources

- Aplastic Anemia and MDS International Foundation http://www.aamds.org/
- Ataxia UK https://www.ataxia.org.uk/
- Leukemia and Lymphoma Society https://www.lls.org/
- National Ataxia Foundation https://www.ataxia.org/

GeneReviews

- SAMD9L-Related Ataxia-Pancytopenia Syndrome https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK435692
Scientific Articles on PubMed

- PubMed
  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?term=%28ataxia-pancytopenia%5BTIAB%5D%29+OR+%28%28ataxia%5BTIAB%5D%29+AND+%28pancytopenia%5BTIAB%5D%29+AND+%28monosomy+7%5BTIAB%5D%29%29+OR+%28myelocerebellar+disorder%5BTIAB%5D%29+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+human%5Bmh%5D

OMIM

- ATAXIA-PANCYTOPENIA SYNDROME
  http://omim.org/entry/159550

- MONOSOMY 7 OF BONE MARROW
  http://omim.org/entry/252270

MedGen

- Myelocerebellar disorder

Sources for This Summary

  Citation on PubMed: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27259050
  Free article on PubMed Central: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4908176/

  Citation on PubMed: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/283689

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