Spinal muscular atrophy with progressive myoclonic epilepsy

Spinal muscular atrophy with progressive myoclonic epilepsy (SMA-PME) is a neurological condition that causes muscle weakness and wasting (atrophy) and a combination of seizures and uncontrollable muscle jerks (myoclonic epilepsy).

In individuals with SMA-PME, spinal muscular atrophy results from a loss of specialized nerve cells, called motor neurons, in the spinal cord and the part of the brain that is connected to the spinal cord (the brainstem). After a few years of normal development, affected children begin experiencing muscle weakness and atrophy in the lower limbs, causing difficulty walking and frequent falls. The muscles in the upper limbs are later affected, and soon the muscle weakness and atrophy spreads throughout the body. Once weakness reaches the muscles used for breathing and swallowing, it leads to life-threatening breathing problems and increased susceptibility to pneumonia.

A few years after the muscle weakness begins, affected individuals start to experience recurrent seizures (epilepsy). Most people with SMA-PME have a variety of seizure types. In addition to myoclonic epilepsy, they may have generalized tonic-clonic seizures (also known as grand mal seizures), which cause muscle rigidity, convulsions, and loss of consciousness. Affected individuals can also have absence seizures, which cause loss of consciousness for a short period that may or may not be accompanied by muscle jerks. In SMA-PME, seizures often increase in frequency over time and are usually not well-controlled with medication. Individuals with SMA-PME may also have episodes of rhythmic shaking (tremors), usually in the hands; these tremors are not thought to be related to epilepsy.

Some people with SMA-PME develop hearing loss caused by nerve damage in the inner ear (sensorineural hearing loss).

Individuals with SMA-PME have a shortened lifespan; they generally live into late childhood or early adulthood. The cause of death is often respiratory failure or pneumonia.

Frequency

SMA-PME is a rare disorder; approximately a dozen affected families have been described in the scientific literature.

Causes

SMA-PME is caused by mutations in the ASAH1 gene. This gene provides instructions for making an enzyme called acid ceramidase. This enzyme is found in lysosomes, which are cell compartments that digest and recycle materials. Within lysosomes, acid
ceramidase breaks down fats called ceramides into a fat called sphingosine and a fatty acid. These two breakdown products are recycled to create new ceramides for the body to use. Ceramides have several roles within cells. For example, they are a component of a fatty substance called myelin that insulates and protects nerve cells.

*ASAH1* gene mutations that cause SMA-PME result in a reduction of acid ceramidase activity to a level less than one-third of normal. Inefficient breakdown of ceramides and impaired production of its breakdown products likely play a role in the nerve cell damage that leads to the features of SMA-PME, but the exact mechanism is unknown.

**Inheritance Pattern**

This condition is inherited in an autosomal recessive pattern, which means both copies of the gene in each cell have mutations. The parents of an individual with an autosomal recessive condition each carry one copy of the mutated gene, but they typically do not show signs and symptoms of the condition.

**Other Names for This Condition**

- hereditary myoclonus with progressive distal muscular atrophy
- Jankovic-Rivera syndrome
- SMA-PME
- SMAPME

**Diagnosis & Management**

**Genetic Testing Information**

- What is genetic testing? [primer/testing/genetictesting](#)

**Other Diagnosis and Management Resources**

Additional Information & Resources

Health Information from MedlinePlus

• Health Topic: Epilepsy
  https://medlineplus.gov/epilepsy.html

• Health Topic: Spinal Muscular Atrophy
  https://medlineplus.gov/spinalmuscularatrophy.html

Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center

• Spinal muscular atrophy-progressive myoclonic epilepsy syndrome

Additional NIH Resources

• National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: Epilepsy Information Page
  https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Epilepsy-Information-Page

• National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: Motor Neuron Diseases Information Page
  https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Motor-neuron-diseases-Information-Page

Educational Resources

• Boston Children's Hospital: Seizures
  http://www.childrenshospital.org/conditions-and-treatments/conditions/s/seizures

• Boys Town National Research Hospital: Types of Hearing Loss
  https://www.boystownhospital.org/knowledge-center/types-of-hearing-loss

• Johns Hopkins Medicine: Myoclonic Seizures
  https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/epilepsy/myoclonic-seizures

• Kennedy Krieger Institute: Epilepsy (Seizure Disorder)
  https://www.kennedykrieger.org/patient-care/conditions/epilepsy-seizure-disorder

• MalaCards: spinal muscular atrophy with progressive myoclonic epilepsy
  https://www.malacards.org/card/spinal_muscular_atrophy_with_progressive_myoclonic_epilepsy

• Merck Manual for Patients and Caregivers: Seizure Disorders
• Orphanet: Spinal muscular atrophy-progressive myoclonic epilepsy syndrome
  https://www.orpha.net/consor/cgi-bin/OC_Exp.php?Lng=EN&Expert=2590

• Washington University, St. Louis: Neuromuscular Disease Center
  https://neuromuscular.wustl.edu/synmot.html#asah1

Patient Support and Advocacy Resources

• Families of SMA
  https://www.curesma.org/

• Medical Home Portal: Seizures/Epilepsy
  https://www.medicalhomeportal.org/diagnoses-and-conditions/seizures-epilepsy

• Muscular Dystrophy UK: Spinal Muscular Atrophy
  https://www.musculardystrophyuk.org/about-muscle-wasting-conditions/spinal-
  muscular-atrophy-sma/

• National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD): Progressive Myoclonus Epilepsy
  https://rarediseases.org/rare-diseases/progressive-myoclonus-epilepsy/

Clinical Information from GeneReviews

• ASAH1-Related Disorders
  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK488189

Scientific Articles on PubMed

• PubMed
  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?term=%28%28hereditary+myoclonus%5B
  TIA%5D%29+AND+%28progressive+distal+muscular+atrophy%5B
  TIA%5D%29+OR+%28sma-pme%5B
  TIA%5D%29+OR+%28spinal+muscular+atrophy%5B
  TIA%5D%29+AND+%28progressive+myoclonic+epilepsy%5B
  TIA%5D%29+AND+english%5B
  la%5D+AND+human%5B
  mh%5D

Catalog of Genes and Diseases from OMIM

• SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY WITH PROGRESSIVE MYOCLOMNIC EPILEPSY
  http://omim.org/entry/159950
Sources for This Summary

  
  Citation on PubMed: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24164096

  
  Citation on PubMed: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15519918

  
  Citation on PubMed: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22703880 
  
  Free article on PubMed Central: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3397266/

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