

ST. NICHOLAS HOSPITAL HEALTHSOURCE

Cutaneous T Cell Lymphoma

Cutaneous T Cell Lymphoma is a lymphoma that affects the skin. While lymphomas are generally associated with cancers of the lymph nodes, this particular type of lymphoma affects the skin, where it often is contained and treatable. However, in an aggressive form, it can also extend beyond the skin to the lymph nodes, blood, and internal organs.

Cutaneous T Cell Lymphoma referred to as mycosis fungoides is a chronic disorder in which malignant T cells (a type of white blood cell that is responsible for immune function) migrate to and multiply in the skin. These malignant cells, when left untreated, may remain in the skin for years, even decades. They eventually spread to the lymph nodes, blood, or internal organs. When treated, especially in the early stages, it can be cured.

In normal skin reactions, the body sends T cells to the skin to fight off infectious invasion. The T cells divide and expand, and after they successfully fight off the infection, they die off. In Cutaneous T Cell Lymphoma, the malignant T cells cycle and divide without dying off, remaining on the skin and proliferating.

Cutaneous T Cell Lymphoma is marked by a flat, pink area of inflamed skin, occasionally with itching. They may remain for years and resolve spontaneously. They can vary in size and are usually scaly. Because they look like several other benign skin disorders, diagnosis is often difficult in this early stage.

As the cells multiply and grow, the lesion thickens, becomes elevated and shows changes in texture. As the lesion grows, diagnosis becomes more obvious.

In the tumor stage of the disease, multiple reddish brown or purplish red nodules develop. At this stage, the disease is advanced and aggressive and prognosis is poor.

A biopsy determines the diagnosis. Treatment depends on the advancement of the disease. There are many treatments available, including several types of radiation therapy.



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