

ERYTHEMA NODOSUM (EN)

Erythema Nodosum (EN) is a relatively uncommon reaction in the skin consisting of red shiny tender nodular lesions most commonly found on the legs. The erythema refers to the red color that is seen at the surface of the skin. The nodosum refers to the fact that these lesions feel like bumps or nodules underneath the skin surface.

Erythema nodosum is a reaction pattern occurring in the subcutaneous tissue and fat. It may be preceded by a low grade fever, fatigue, and joint pains. In about half of the cases, there is an internal condition occurring in the body which contributes to its formation. These include the use of certain medications, certain infections, and a number of other less likely causes. In order to identify cause for the erythema nodosum, it may be necessary to perform blood and laboratory tests. At times, however, the cause cannot be determined and erythema nodosum is considered to be idiopathic in nature.

Erythema nodosum often runs an acute course lasting for a brief period from weeks to months. In a small percentage of cases, it can be a more chronic condition. The red nodules are usually confined to the lower legs, but can develop anywhere there is fat under the skin including the thighs, arms, and trunk. Initially, the lesions are more red and inflamed in appearance, but with time become more bruise like. The individual lesions normally do not form open sores or ulcers. An individual spot normally heals in a period of a few weeks.

The first step in treating erythema nodosum is to try to determine the cause. If this cause can be eliminated or treated then a quicker recovery will occur. Independent of the cause, however, there is effective treatment. These include local measures such as leg elevation and heat application. Oral medications called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agents which include common medicines such as Advil, Aleve, or Motrin are a first line of treatment. In some cases, a brief course of oral steroids is necessary.

Fortunately, in most cases erythema nodosum will resolve and the symptoms can be controlled. If you have any other questions regarding this condition, please ask me before you leave the office.