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THE MANAGEMENT OF PAIN IN SICKLE CELL DISEASE

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The pain of vaso-occlusive crisis in sickle cell disease is excruciating and sometimes incapacitating.24, 34, 46 It is the most common and debilitating problem encountered by children, adolescents, and adults with sickle cell disease.1, 13 It is intensely painful, persists for long periods of time, and is the most common cause of hospitalization in patients with sickle cell hemoglobinopathy.13, 35 Severe pain can occur at as early as 6 months of life and at unpredictable intervals throughout an affected individual's life. How well or poorly this pain is treated has important consequences as to how patients cope with pain and life. Unfortunately, few advances have been made in the treatment of painful crises, and, even in the best of hands, this pain may be difficult or impossible to treat. This article discusses the pathophysiology of sickle cell disease, defines acute and chronic pain syndromes in sickle cell disease, outlines barriers to effective care, and provides various approaches to pain treatment.

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