



Gastrointestinal Manifestations of Systemic Mastocytosis?

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What Is Systemic Mastocytosis?

Systemic Mastocytosis is a rare group of conditions where the body makes too many mast cells. Mast cells are a type of immune cell that help protect us from infections by releasing chemicals like histamine to generate an immune response. However, when there are too many mast cells, they can release these chemicals in large amounts. This usually results in symptoms like those found in allergic reactions. Some of these may be potentially life-threatening and known as anaphylactic reactions. Symptoms of anaphylaxis include swelling, hives, difficulty breathing, and feeling of passing out.

Hives – welts on the skin that are raised and itch.

Manifestations of GI Systemic Mastocytosis

When mast cells build up in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, they can release histamine and other substances that throw off the normal functioning of the stomach and intestines which cause various signs and symptoms. These commonly occur along with symptoms in other parts of the body such as the skin and after exposure to a trigger. GI symptoms can include:

- **Abdominal Bloating:** Bloating can be described as a feeling of stomach distension or that there is an inflated balloon in the abdomen.

The Abdomen is the area between the chest and the hips that contains the stomach, small intestine, large intestine (colon), liver, gall bladder, pancreas, and spleen. It is also sometimes referred to as the belly area.

- **Diarrhea:** Passing frequent and loose or watery stools.
- **Stomach Pain or Cramping:** Pain that can be felt anywhere in the abdomen. It is often described as a “cramping feeling”.

- **Nausea:** Nausea refers to when you have the feeling you will vomit. It often occurs with stomach discomfort.
- **Vomiting:** Vomiting is when the contents of the stomach pass up the esophagus back into the mouth. The Esophagus is the muscular tube which connects the mouth to the stomach.
- **Loss of Appetite:** This is when your desire to eat is less than normal. This may be caused by pain and discomfort, nausea and/or vomiting.
- **Weight Loss:** Weight loss in Systemic Mastocytosis often occurs due to eating less food due to GI symptoms associated with eating.
- **Enlarged Liver:** Due to infiltration from abnormal mast cells. This is often detected on a radiology test such as a CT scan or is detected on a physical exam.

These gastrointestinal symptoms also commonly occur in other conditions. Therefore, it is important to work with a healthcare provider to confirm a proper diagnosis.

Working with a Healthcare Provider

A partnership between a patient and healthcare provider is essential when managing all chronic illnesses. Because the time spent with your healthcare provider is both limited and valuable, you can maximize it by following some simple guidelines before and after the visit.

- Have a list of other known chronic medical conditions: Because symptoms of Systemic Mastocytosis can occur all over the body it is important to discuss your known medical history at your visit.
- Have a list of Medications: medications you are currently taking (or have taken in the past) including prescriptions, over the counter, supplements and herbal preparations. These should include medications for all health conditions you have.
- Allergies: Before going to your appointment, be sure to create a list of all allergies to medications or other allergies and the type of reaction. This is especially important if you have experienced anaphylactic reactions or needed a hospital visit due to an allergic reaction.
- Consider bringing support: It is often helpful to ask a friend or relative to come to the visit with you for added support. They can assist in taking notes so you can fully attend the appointment.

About IFFGD

The International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit education and research organization. We work to promote awareness, scientific advancement, and improved care for people affected by chronic digestive conditions. Our mission is to inform, assist, and support people affected by gastrointestinal disorders. Founded in 1991, we rely on donors to carry out our mission. Visit our website at: www.iffgd.org.

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