



SICKLE CELL CLINIC

Priapism

What is priapism?

Priapism is a painful erection of the penis that last for an extended period of time. This erection is not related to sexual arousal.

Who can get priapism?

While priapism is more common in older patients with sickle cell disease, it can begin for some at a young age.

What causes priapism?

- Priapism is caused by sickling of red blood cells in the penis. This causes a buildup of blood cells in the penis causing it to be erect. As blood continues to come into the penis but cannot leave the penis, the erection remains and can become very painful.
- Some episodes of priapism will get better at home within a few minutes but others can last longer.
- This is a serious condition which requires medical attention.
- You need to be seen in the emergency room for an episode of priapism, especially if it has been going on for more than 1-2 hours.

Can this cause problems?

During these painful episodes of priapism, the tissues of the penis can become injured. Over time, this can lead to impotency (not able to get an erection with sexual arousal) or scarring making it harder for a patient to have children.

Priapism may be embarrassing for children with sickle cell disease.

Some children with sickle cell may not want to discuss this complication with family members. It is important to begin talking about priapism with a child early so they know to seek medical attention if it occurs.