



ADHESIVE ARACHNOIDITIS (AA) 2026

Adhesive arachnoiditis (AA) is an inflammatory, autoimmune disease that fuses cauda equina nerve roots to the arachnoid membrane which is the inner lining of the spinal canal cover. The fusion of the two tissues forms a mass inside the spinal canal which entraps nerve roots and leads to severe pain, neurologic impairments, and dysfunction of the legs, feet, bladder, bowel, and sex organs. Spinal fluid flow may be interrupted which causes headache, blurred vision, tinnitus, and vertigo.

AA is caused either by direct trauma to the spinal cord and canal or by an inflammatory, autoimmune disease that originates outside the spinal canal producing painful conditions in multiple body systems which may eventually include the arachnoid membrane and cauda equina. The inflammatory, autoimmune process that leads to AA may be an autoimmune disease or disorder that may be caused by reactivation of the Epstein-Barr or other virus or Lyme disease.

Persons who have a genetic connective tissue disease especially Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, an anatomic spine abnormality (especially scoliosis), severe trauma, or who have had a serious infection (specifically Lyme disease or infectious mononucleosis) at a young age are at a higher risk to develop AA.

At this time there is no cure for AA, but as with other chronic illnesses, such as diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis, it can be controlled so that a person can live a comfortable, quality life. Treatment consists of: (1) suppression of inflammation and autoimmunity, (2) regeneration of damaged tissues, (3) control of pain. The initial phase of treatment is focused on suppression of inflammation and autoimmunity. Without effective control of inflammation and autoimmunity, AA can be a progressive disease with deterioration that results in a bed-bound state and premature death. Once inflammation is reasonably suppressed the treatment focusses on regeneration of damaged tissue and pain control. In the past, AA was commonly referred to as the “devil’s disease” or “disease of despair.” Suicide has historically been a common occurrence with AA. Today’s treatment, however, has progressed to the point that control is sufficient to prevent suicide and despair.