Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis Syndrome (TENS)

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What is “TENS”?

“Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis Syndrome” is a rare illness resulting in a sheet-like loss of the skin’s first layer known as the epidermis and sometimes the second layer of skin called the dermis and mucous membranes in the nose, mouth and throat.

What causes “TENS”?

The cause is not known for sure. However, prescription drugs such as antibiotics and dilantin can create an allergic response that suppresses the immune system, making it difficult to fight against infection.

Who can get “TENS”?

Although “TENS” affects mostly adults, it can occur at any age.

Why do “TENS” patients go to the Ross Tilley Burn Centre for treatment?

Since the patient can lose a large amount of skin, the Burn Centre team will watch the patient closely, manage his/her pain, monitor the wound healing and change any dressings daily.

What are some of the serious complications caused by “TENS”?

- Risk of infection
- Difficulty breathing, which may require the patient to use a ventilator
- Difficulty seeing if the inside of the eyelid sticks to the eye itself

Can scarring occur from “TENS”?

Chances of scarring are minimal. Once the outer layer of skin peels off, it eventually grows back. However, there may be a loss of skin colour, especially if the patient has darker skin.

What are the signs and symptoms of “TENS”?

Stage 1: Prodromal Phase

- Lasts 2 to 4 days
- Fever and sore throat
- Flat rash on skin
- Parts of or all the body may be covered with large blisters within 24 to 96 hours
- Skin may peel off the body in “sheets”

Stage 2: Critical Phase

- Lasts 4 to 10 days
- Large parts of the body become red and painfully raw
- Inside of the eyelid may stick to the eye itself

Stage 3: Convalescent Phase

- Skin may heal within 10 to 28 days
- Eyes may be sensitive to light and patient may be required to wear sunglasses indoors

What is the treatment for “TENS”?

Dressings are applied to the open areas of the skin. Two kinds of dressings can be used to treat the patient:

1. BioBrane®
   A man-made “skin-like” sheet with tiny holes so fluid can pass through easily. It is stapled into place during an operation and observed daily as the skin heals underneath.

2. Jelonet® Gauze
   A greasy, “mesh-like” dressing placed on the open areas of the skin, covered with gauze dressing allowing the skin to heal, and changed daily.

What can the nursing staff do to reduce the patient’s pain?

There are four ways we can reduce each patient’s pain:

1. The patient will either swallow the medication or receive it through an intravenous line.

2. Dressings help to protect the skin from exposure to the air and prevent open areas from sticking to the bed sheets.

3. A liquid medication called “xylocaine viscous” is applied to any open sores in the patient’s mouth in order to make them numb.

4. Ointment is applied to the lips and face to decrease bleeding and help with healing.

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