Non-allergic angioedema

We have written this factsheet to give you important information about non-allergic angioedema and how we will treat and manage it once you leave hospital. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of your healthcare team.

What is non allergic angioedema?

Non allergic angioedema is a condition that causes sudden swelling under the skin. It most often affects areas such as the eyelids and lips. Sometimes, it can also involve the tongue or throat. Although the swelling can look dramatic and feel frightening, it is usually temporary and often settles on its own.

What causes non allergic angioedema?

Unlike allergic angioedema, this form is not triggered by an allergic reaction and does not involve the immune system reacting to a specific food, medication, or environmental factor. In non-allergic angioedema, the swelling happens because certain chemicals in the body cause small blood vessels to leak fluid into the surrounding tissues.

Types of non allergic angioedema

Medication related angioedema - most cases are caused by medications used for blood pressure, which can cause swelling after months or years of use.

Other causes - there are several other causes of non-allergic angioedema. Your doctor will advise you if you need further follow-up. In some cases, no cause of angioedema is identified.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on your symptoms, medical history, and sometimes blood tests. Your healthcare professional may ask about medications you take, whether anyone in your family has similar symptoms, and how often the swelling happens.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the type of angioedema. **Stopping a triggering medication** often prevents further swelling. Other medications may be used in cases that are more severe.

Your doctor may give you **antihistamines** at higher doses than those printed on the medicine's packaging. This is known as off-licence use. It is sometimes recommended for people who experience troublesome swelling episodes.

Tranexamic acid is sometimes used off-licence to help manage swelling caused by angioedema. Although this medicine is more commonly used to reduce bleeding, it has previously been shown that it may help limit the swelling in certain types of angioedema.

Any decision to use higher-dose antihistamines or tranexamic acid should be made by a healthcare professional who will explain the plan and outline how long the treatment should continue.

What are the side effects of treatment?

Stopping a blood pressure medicine

If your swelling was caused by a blood pressure medicine, you should not take it again. Your GP will review your blood pressure and may start a different type of medicine. Do not stop any of your other medicines unless a healthcare professional tells you to.

Antihistamines

Most people have no problems with antihistamines. At higher doses, some people feel drowsy or have a dry mouth or headache. If you feel drowsy, do not drive or use machinery and avoid alcohol.

Tranexamic acid

Common side effects include nausea (feeling sick), diarrhoea, and an upset stomach. Rarely, tranexamic acid can increase the risk of blood clots. Tell your doctor if you have ever had a blood clot or a stroke, or if you take the combined contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

Stop taking it and get urgent medical help if you have:

- pain or swelling in one leg
- chest pain or sudden shortness of breath
- any change in your eyesight, including how you see colours.

What will happen if I don't have treatment?

Swelling from non-allergic angioedema often settles on its own within 1 to 3 days. However, if the cause is not found or you keep taking a medicine that triggered it, the swelling is likely to come back and later episodes can be more severe. In rare cases, swelling of the tongue or throat can affect your breathing, which can be life-threatening. Treatment aims to reduce how often swelling happens and how severe it is.

Ongoing care

After your treatment, your care will usually continue either with your GP or through a referral to our immunology clinic.

Your GP can monitor your symptoms and identify possible triggers. If further investigations are needed, you may be referred to our immunology clinic, where a specialist team can test for rarer causes of the swelling and offer treatments not typically available through your GP.

When to get further help

You should seek the advice of a healthcare professional or call 999 if:

- your symptoms become worse
- you notice any difficulty swallowing
- there are changes in your voice
- there is a feeling of tightness in your throat.

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/angioedema
www.nhs.uk/medicines/tranexamic-acid
www.allergyuk.org

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