Fibromuscular Dysplasia Fact Sheet

What is Fibromuscular Dysplasia?

Fibromuscular Dysplasia (FMD) is a disease in which the cells in the artery walls develop abnormally. This causes blood vessels to narrow and bulge in places. The random narrowing and bulging of the vessels causes them to look like a string of beads. FMD lowers or stops blood flow to different organs in the body depending on which arteries it has damaged.

FMD often affects the carotid arteries that lead through the neck up to the brain. Arteries leading to the kidneys, within the brain, and throughout the body can also be affected.

What are the symptoms of FMD?

Some people with FMD have symptoms, while others do not. What you feel and how you feel it depends on which artery is affected by FMD, and how much the artery has been damaged. Damage to the kidney arteries (renal arteries) can result in high blood pressure, kidney tissue damage, and even kidney failure. Damage to the brain arteries (carotid arteries) can result in dizziness or vertigo, chronic headaches, ringing in the ears, weakness or numbness in the face, neck pain, or changes in vision. A person with FMD may also suffer from pain or numbness in the abdomen, legs, and arms as well.

Who has FMD?

Anyone can have FMD, but it is more common in women between the ages of 30 and 50. *NEW* In fact, women are 2 to 10 times more likely to have FMD than men.

What causes FMD?

The cause of FMD is unknown, but there are some likely risk factors. Genetics may play a role in causing FMD. If one family member has FMD, the chances of other family members having it are approximately 10%. Hormones may also be a cause since FMD mainly affects women. Lack of oxygen to the arteries and stress to the artery walls is also a known cause of FMD.

How is FMD diagnosed?

A CT Scan, MRI, ultrasound, and angiogram/arteriogram are four ways that FMD can be detected. In most cases, an angiogram is performed to detect the degree of thinning or blockage in the artery. An angiogram also detects changes such as tears or weak areas in the vessel walls.
An angiogram involves inserting a wire into the damaged artery and injecting a dye that is detected by the x-ray. The person is awake when this happens, but is given medication to feel comfortable.

**How is FMD treated?**
There is no treatment to cure FMD, but the symptoms can be managed. If there is very little narrowing of the artery, an anti-platelet such as aspirin or an anticoagulant can be taken daily. Other treatments include angioplasty in which a catheter line is run all the way up to the damaged artery and a small balloon is inflated to open up the blocked artery. Sometimes, the artery will not stay open on its own and a stent is inserted to hold the area open.

**For more information contact:**
National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
Cholesterol Education Project
1-800-575-WELL (575-9355)
[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/chn](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/chn)