

# Top Five Frequently Asked Questions About **Sickle Cell Trait**

## Q. WHAT IS SICKLE CELL TRAIT?

A. Sickle cell trait (SCT) is not a disease, but having it means that a person has inherited the sickle cell gene from one of his or her parents. People with SCT usually do not have any symptoms of sickle cell disease (SCD) and live a normal life. In rare cases, some people with SCT might experience complications of SCD; such as “pain episodes” or “crises” and, in extreme circumstances, sudden death (see Sickle Cell Trait and the Athlete).

## Q. WHAT IS SICKLE CELL DISEASE?

A. Sickle cell disease describes a group of inherited red blood cell disorders.

- In SCD, the red blood cells become hard and sticky and look like a C-shaped farm tool called a “sickle.”
- Sickle cells die early, which causes a constant shortage of red blood cells.
- Sickle cells can also get stuck in small blood vessels and block the flow of blood and oxygen to organs in the body. These blockages cause repeated episodes of severe pain, organ damage, serious infections or even stroke.
- SCD is inherited when a child receives two sickle cell genes—one from each parent.

## Q. HOW DOES SOMEONE GET SICKLE CELL TRAIT?

A. People who have inherited one sickle cell gene and one normal gene have SCT. This means the person won't have the disease, but will be a trait “carrier” and can pass it on to his or her children.

## Q. WHO IS AFFECTED BY SICKLE CELL TRAIT?

A. SCT affects one in 12 blacks or African-Americans in the U.S.

- People whose families come from Africa, India, Central and South America, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Greece and Turkey can also have SCT.
- Approximately 3 million people living in the U.S. have SCT and many are unaware of their status.

## Q. HOW WILL A PERSON KNOW IF HE OR SHE HAS SICKLE CELL TRAIT?

A. A simple blood test can be done to find out if someone has SCT. Contact your primary care physician or clinic or the Ohio Regional Sickle Cell Project in your county (see Project Profiles) for testing availability.

For more information about sickle cell trait and links to other websites, go to:  
Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell/freematerials.html>