Learning About MRI Scans Helps Kids with Sickle-Cell Disease Sit Tight

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As many parents know, it's tough for kids to sit still. But staying motionless is required for children with sickle-cell disease when they have to get an MRI scan. The good news is what may help these young patients successfully complete MRI scans, and avoid the risks that come with sedation, is simply being prepared for what happens during the procedure, according to findings published in the journal Pediatric Radiology.

For the study, scientists from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital evaluated 71 kids, ages 5 through 12, and found that those children who participated in a short MRI preparation program before having the procedure were eight times more likely to finish the scans without needing anesthesia than patients of the same age who didn't undergo preparation.

"Some patients chose to listen to music or to squeeze a ball to help them remember not to move," said Katherine Cejda, MS, a St. Jude child life specialist. "Some patients had the option of watching movies or having parents or other adults in the room with them during the test."

The study is the first designed to check the effectiveness of this approach and also the first to focus on kids with sickle-cell disease.

September is National Sickle Cell Awareness Month. The observance originated in 1975 when the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America (SCDAA) and its member organizations began conducting month-long events to call attention to sickle cell disease and the need to address the problem at national and local levels.

Sickle-cell disease is an inherited form of anemia—a condition in which the body doesn't produce enough healthy red blood cells or hemoglobin, a protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen through the body. Sickle-cell disease occurs in 1 out of every 500 African-American births and 1 out of every 36,000 hispanic births. Sickle cell trait occurs in approximately 1 in 12 African Americans, according to SCDAA.

Click here for more information on sickle-cell disease and click here to see our interview with Grammy Award-winning rapper Prodigy as he talks about living with sickle-cell disease.

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