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# Antiphospholipid Syndrome

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

## Source

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). *Antiphospholipid Syndrome Information Page*.

Antiphospholipid syndrome (APS) is an autoimmune disorder caused when antibodies -- immune system cells that fight off bacteria and viruses -- mistakenly attack healthy body tissues and organs. In APS, specific antibodies activate the inner lining of blood vessels, which leads to the formation of blood clots in arteries or veins. APS is sometimes called "sticky blood syndrome," because of the increased tendency to form blood clots in the veins and arteries. The symptoms of APS are due to the abnormal blood clotting. Clots can develop in the veins of the legs and lungs, or in the placenta of pregnant women. One of the most serious complications of APS occurs when a clot forms in the brain and causes a stroke. Other neurological symptoms include chronic headaches, dementia (similar to the dementia of Alzheimer's disease), and seizures. Infrequently, individuals will develop *chorea* (a movement disorder in which the body and limbs writhe uncontrollably), cognitive dysfunction (such as poor memory), transverse myelitis, depression or psychosis, optic neuropathy, or sudden hearing loss. In pregnant women, clots in the placenta can cause miscarriages. APS is diagnosed by the presence of a positive antiphospholipid antibody and either a history of blood clots in an artery or vein or a history of multiple miscarriages or other pregnancy problems. Some individuals will have a characteristic lacy, net-like red rash called *livedo reticularis* over their wrists and knees.