

## Pitt to lead study of rare autoimmune disorder

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Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine are leading a worldwide effort to study a treatment for a rare autoimmune disorder called myositis, thanks to a five-year, \$8 million contract from the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Chester V. Oddis, is principal investigator for the effort, which involves 36 other scientists from 18 states and five countries, including Canada, the Czech Republic, Sweden and England.

Myositis is a general term for several conditions. Also known as inflammatory myopathies, they are musculoskeletal disorders characterized by muscle weakness thought to be autoimmune diseases. This means that the body's immune system, which normally fights infections and viruses, for reasons unknown turns on itself and attacks the muscle tissue and sometimes skin, joints and lungs, causing rash, arthritis and shortness of breath, according to a news release.

The study will evaluate the effectiveness of a drug called rituximab in adults and children diagnosed with dermatomyositis (a disease that causes muscle weakness and rash) and adults diagnosed with polymyositis, which is not associated with a rash. The study doctors want to know whether rituximab improves symptoms of these diseases.

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*More details in tomorrow's Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.*

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