The autoimmune hemolytic anemias are rare disorders characterized by the premature destruction (hemolysis) of red blood cells at a rate faster than they can be replaced. Acquired hemolytic anemias are non-genetic in origin. Idiopathic acquired autoimmune diseases occur when the body's natural defenses against invading organisms (e.g., lymphocytes, antibodies) destroy its own healthy tissues for no known reason. Normally, the red blood cells (erythrocytes) have a life span of approximately 120 days before being removed by the spleen. The severity of this type of anemia is determined by the life span of the red blood cell and by the rate at which these cells are replaced by the bone marrow. When acquired autoimmune hemolytic anemia occurs from unknown causes, it affects twice as many women as men, specifically women under 50 years old. Cold antibody hemolytic anemia most commonly affects elderly persons, and warm antibody hemolytic anemia can affect anyone at any age. Upon suspicion of hemolytic anemia, blood will be tested to determine the proportion of immature red blood cells to mature ones. If the ratio is high, hemolytic anemia is likely. Another blood test (Coombs test) is used to determine whether the amount of certain antibodies is higher than normal. If so, the diagnosis may be autoimmune hemolytic anemia.