

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT POLYMYALGIA RHEUMATICA

In the Clinic  
Annals of Internal Medicine

## What Is Polymyalgia Rheumatica?

Polymyalgia rheumatica (PMR) is a common disorder that causes widespread pain and stiffness that usually affects your neck, shoulder, or hip. It is prevalent in women aged 50 years or older and is most common after age 70. PMR is often linked with a disease called giant cell arteritis (GCA). GCA causes swelling in the lining of your arteries, and patients with this disease may also have sore and stiff shoulders.

## What Are the Warning Signs?

- Pain that comes on suddenly, especially in your neck, shoulder, or hip
- Difficulty lifting your arms due to pain
- Muscle weakness
- Swelling in the hands and feet
- Morning stiffness
- Low-grade fever
- Weight loss

## How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms and perform a physical examination.
- You may need blood tests so that your doctor can get more information about your condition.
- Imaging tests, such as MRI or PET scans, are sometimes needed to make sure that other diseases are not causing your symptoms.

## How Is It Treated?

- PMR is usually treated with medicines called glucocorticoids (GCs). Most people begin to feel better within days of starting these drugs. Your doctor will pay close attention to your symptoms and side effects during and after treatment.
- When your symptoms are under control, your doctor will slowly lower the amount of GCs that you take.
- If GCs do not help you feel better, other medicines can be tried. Ask your doctor which one is best for you.
- If your PMR symptoms go away and come back, you may have GCA. If your doctor suspects GCA, you may need additional tests and treatment.



- Your doctor may also suggest exercises to help keep your muscles strong.

## Questions for My Doctor

- Could anything else be causing my pain and stiffness?
- Will taking over-the-counter pain killers give me relief?
- Can I exercise?
- Will I need more tests?
- How long will I need to take the medicine?
- Does the medicine have side effects?
- What if my symptoms come back after I finish the medicine?
- How can I tell if I have PMR or GCA?

## For More Information



### American College of Rheumatology

[www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Polymyalgia-Rheumatica](http://www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Polymyalgia-Rheumatica)

### Arthritis Foundation

[www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/polymyalgia-rheumatica](http://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/polymyalgia-rheumatica)

### MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/polymyalgiarheumatica.html>

### Vasculitis Foundation

[www.vasculitisfoundation.org/education/forms/polymyalgia-rheumatica](http://www.vasculitisfoundation.org/education/forms/polymyalgia-rheumatica)