

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GIANT CELL ARTERITIS

In the Clinic
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What Is Giant Cell Arteritis?

Giant cell arteritis (GCA) is a disease that happens when the body's defense system (immune system) wrongly attacks your arteries, causing them to become inflamed (or swollen). This inflammation causes your arteries to narrow, which affects blood flow. The cause of GCA is not known, but there are treatments available. You may be at higher risk for GCA if you are:

- Female
- Older than 50 years
- White

What Are the Warning Signs?

- Headache
- Tender scalp
- Sore and stiff shoulders and thighs
- Jaw pain when chewing
- Fever
- Feeling tired
- Less appetite than usual
- Weight loss
- Loss of vision in one or both eyes, double vision, or blurred vision

How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will perform a careful examination of your head and neck. He or she may also examine your vision.
- You may have your pulse checked or blood pressure taken in your arms and legs.
- You may have a blood test to check for signs of GCA.
- Your doctor may take a small piece of tissue taken from an affected artery. This is called a biopsy.
- You may also have imaging tests, such as an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). This can help your doctor look more closely at your arteries.



How Is It Treated?

- GCA is treated with medicines called corticosteroids. These medicines reduce the inflammation in your arteries.
- Treatment usually lasts months to years. This helps prevent GCA from coming back.
- The dose of corticosteroids has to be decreased slowly. This means when your treatment is finished, your doctor will gradually reduce the amount of medicine that you take over time.
- Your doctor may also prescribe a low dose of aspirin to reduce your risk for heart attack or stroke.

Questions For My Doctor

- When will I start to feel better?
- How long will I need to take the medicine?
- Does the medicine have any side effects?
- What should I do if my symptoms come back?
- Can I still go about my usual activities?
- Does GCA put me at risk for other health problems?

For More Information



Medline Plus

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

American College of Rheumatology

www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Giant-Cell-Arteritis