

GIANT CELL ARTERITIS (GCA)

What is Giant Cell Arteritis?

Giant cell arteritis (GCA) is a vasculitis of large and medium sized vessels. It may be generalized, but vessel inflammation most frequently involves vessels in the scalp and head, especially the arteries over the temples.

What causes GCA?

There is no known cause of GCA, but it is not contagious. Researchers believe aging has something to do with the disease.

Who gets GCA?

Women, Caucasians, and individuals over 50 years of age are most commonly affected by GCA. The average age at onset is 72. Women are affected 2 to 3 times more often than men. The disease is most common in people of Scandinavian descent.

What are the symptoms?

The onset of the symptoms in GCA tends to be gradual. Symptoms include low grade fever, fatigue, weakness and weight loss.

Nearly one-half of patients suffer from pain in the jaw after chewing (called jaw claudication).

Impaired vision is often an early manifestation of the disease.

Polymyalgia rheumatica (PMR), which is characterized by pain in the shoulders and hips, is closely linked to GCA, occurring in about 40-50 % of patients.

How is GCA diagnosed?

Temporal artery biopsy is performed in all cases of suspected GCA. Most patients with GCA also have a very high erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR). Other ways to diagnose GCA include: ultrasonography, angiographic examination, CT, MRI and PET scans.

What is the prognosis?

The use of steroids has proven effective in the treatment of GCA. Relapses are seen more frequently in the first year or two of the disease.

What is the treatment?

Steroid treatment should begin once the diagnosis of GCA is established. Daily dosing is more effective than alternate day dosing. Response usually occurs within 2 to 4 weeks after the start of therapy.

What is Vasculitis?

Vasculitis is an inflammation of the blood vessels, arteries, veins or capillaries. Vasculitis is a family of diseases. The cause of vasculitis is unknown, but through research and treatment, outcomes have improved significantly over the past 20 years.

Continued research is essential for further advances in these diseases, which can be life-threatening.

About the Vasculitis Foundation

The Vasculitis Foundation (VF) is the largest international patient support group for people with vasculitis.

Through its website, newsletter, brochures, informational materials, medical consultants, symposia and chapters, VF raises awareness and educates its patients, family members and friends.



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www.VasculitisFoundation.org

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