

VASCULITIS FACTS

1. **Vasculitis represents a family of 15 rare diseases** including: Behcet's disease, Buerger's disease, Central Nervous System, Churg Strauss syndrome, Cryoglobulinemia, Giant Cell Arteritis, Henoch-Schönlein purpura, Hypersensitivity vasculitis, Kawasaki disease, Microscopic Polyangiitis, Polyarteritis nodosa, Polymyalgia rheumatica, Rheumatoid vasculitis, Takayasu's arteritis, and Wegener's Granulomatosis.
2. Vasculitis is **an autoimmune disease**. The cause of autoimmune disease is unknown. An autoimmune disease occurs when the body mistakes its own cells for foreign invaders and produces antibodies to attack the perceived invaders as a defense against infection.
3. Vasculitis is an **inflammation of the blood vessels, arteries, veins, or capillaries**. The inflammation of the blood vessel causes a weakening and narrowing of the blood vessel wall that deprives affected tissues and organs of blood supply resulting in tissue and organ damage.
4. Vasculitis **can affect any blood vessel or organ** in the body. Signs and symptoms of vasculitis vary widely in type and severity. Some are specific to a particular organ and others are non specific causing general aches, pains and fatigue. Organ systems affected include the skin, joints, lungs, kidneys, gastrointestinal tract, blood, eyes, brain, nerves, sinuses, nose and ears.
5. **The cause of vasculitis is unknown**. It affects people of all ages, gender, race and nationalities. Some types of vasculitis are more likely to occur in certain populations than others.
6. **Early diagnosis of vasculitis is critical** to avoid permanent organ damage. Diagnosis of vasculitis is made by clinical and laboratory findings. Laboratory tests include blood tests, urinalysis, chest and sinus x-rays and other tests as needed. A tissue biopsy is usually the definitive test.
7. Vasculitis is **treated with prescription medications** with the goal of stopping the inflammation and relieving the symptoms. Corticosteroid medication and cytotoxic medicines are the drugs that are commonly prescribed. There is no known cure for vasculitis and its course varies from person to person. Some people go into remission. For others, the disease remains chronic with recurring relapses. In rare cases, vasculitis causes severe disability or death.
8. Vasculitis is a **rare disease**. For example, the incidence of Wegener's Granulomatosis and Polyarteritis nodosa is 3/100,000 persons. The incidence of Giant Cell Arteritis and Henoch-Schönlein purpura is 20/100,000 persons. Takayasu's arteritis occurs in 1/100,000 persons. Each year, 100,000 Americans are hospitalized for vasculitis care.