



The term vasculitis means inflammation of the blood vessels, arteries, veins or capillaries. When such inflammation occurs, it causes changes in the walls of blood vessels, such as weakening and narrowing that can progress to the point of blood vessel blockage.

A result of vasculitis is that the tissues and organs supplied by affected blood vessels do not get enough blood. This can cause organ and tissue damage that can even lead to death.

Vasculitis is a family of rare diseases that can affect people of all ages. Though some forms of vasculitis improve on their own, most require treatment. The length of treatment varies, with some people using medications for extended periods of time.

The different types of vasculitis are classified according to the size and location of the blood vessels that are affected.

## Who gets vasculitis?

Vasculitis can affect people of all ages, from children to older adults. Some types of vasculitis occur in certain age groups more than others.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary from patient to patient and depend upon the type of vasculitis. Common symptoms often include a combination of:

- Abdominal pain/gastrointestinal bleeding
- Asthma
- Atypical severe headaches
- Chronic sinusitis/nasal allergies
- Cough/shortness of breath
- Fatigue/weakness
- Fever
- Joint pain/ facial soreness
- Kidney problems (bloody urine, dark urine)
- Lung inflammation
- Nerve problems (numbness, weakness, pain)
- Skin lesions/rashes
- Vision changes

## What causes vasculitis?

In most cases, the cause of vasculitis is unknown. A combination of factors can cause the inflammatory process to be set in motion. Vasculitis is an autoimmune disease and for reasons that are not yet understood, these diseases occur when the body mistakenly thinks that some of its own cells are foreign invaders and produces antibodies as if it were an infection.

## How is vasculitis diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made by clinical and laboratory findings, such as blood tests, urinalysis, chest and sinus x-rays, angiograms and other tests. A tissue biopsy is usually the definitive test.

## How is vasculitis treated?

Treatment for vasculitis depends on the severity of symptoms and the patient's general health. Treatment can include corticosteroids, immunosuppressive

drugs, new biologic therapeutics and antibiotics. Other treatments might include plasmapheresis and intravenous gamma globulin.

## What is the prognosis?

Early diagnosis and proper treatment can bring vasculitis into remission, although there is still no known cure. Many forms of vasculitis are chronic. Still, many patients lead full, productive lives with management of their chronic disease.

## Vasculitis, a family of diseases

- Behcet's disease
- Buerger's disease
- Central Nervous System
- Eosinophilic granulomatosis with polyangiitis  
(EGPA/Churg Strauss syndrome)
- Cryoglobulinemia vasculitis
- Giant cell arteritis
- Henoch-Schönlein purpura
- Hypersensitivity vasculitis
- Kawasaki disease
- Microscopic polyangiitis
- Polyarteritis nodosa
- Polymyalgia rheumatica
- Rheumatoid vasculitis
- Takayasu's arteritis
- Granulomatosis with polyangiitis  
(GPA/Wegener's)

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