



Overview of Giant Cell Arteritis

Giant cell arteritis is a type of disorder that is marked by blood vessel inflammation.

People with giant cell arteritis often have [polymyalgia rheumatica](#), a disorder associated with pain and stiffness in the neck, shoulder, and hip.

What happens in giant cell arteritis?

Giant cell arteritis causes narrowed arteries, which reduces blood flow. The disorder mostly affects arteries located on each side of the head, although other blood vessels can also become inflamed.

Giant cell arteritis can cause potentially serious problems if untreated, including permanent vision loss and stroke. It is critical to report any symptoms to your doctor and to receive early treatment to prevent permanent tissue damage.

Who Gets Giant Cell Arteritis?

Women are more likely than men to develop giant cell arteritis, but men with the disorder are more likely to suffer eye damage that could result in blindness. Giant cell arteritis mostly affects people over the age of 50, with highest rates at 70 to 80 years of age.

Symptoms of Giant Cell Arteritis

Signs of giant cell arteritis can include:

- Flu-like symptoms early in the disease, such as tiredness, appetite loss, and fever.
- Headaches.
- Pain and tenderness over the temples.
- Double vision or vision loss.
- Dizziness.
- Problems with coordination and balance.
- Pain in the jaw and tongue, especially when eating.
- Difficulty in opening the mouth wide.

- Scalp scores (rare cases).

Diagnosis of Giant Cell Arteritis

To diagnose you with giant cell arteritis, your doctor will:

- Ask you about your medical history.
- Give you a physical exam to determine if the arteries in your temples are inflamed, tender to the touch, and have a reduced pulse.
- Take a small section of the artery in your temple to examine it under a microscope.

Treatment of Giant Cell Arteritis

Symptoms of giant cell arteritis quickly disappear when treated with corticosteroid medications, such as prednisone. The duration of drug treatment differs for each person. Your doctor will typically keep you on high doses of corticosteroids for about 1 month. Symptoms may develop when the corticosteroid dose is reduced to lower levels. After a while, symptoms usually clear up completely, and the doctor can stop the medication altogether.

It is critical to report any symptoms to your doctor and to receive early treatment in order to prevent serious problems, including permanent vision loss and stroke.

Research Progress Related to Giant Cell Arteritis

Research on giant cell arteritis includes:

- Researchers studying possible causes of giant cell arteritis are investigating the roles of genetics and environment, as well as immune system problems.
- By examining people with and without the condition, doctors are starting to understand factors associated with disease symptoms and outcomes. For example, women are more likely than men to have jaw involvement from giant cell arteritis, while men are more likely to have eye involvement that can lead to blindness.
- Researchers are also following patients over time through the Vasculitis Clinical Research Consortium. Data from these studies will be used to examine the genetics and causes of giant cell arteritis, find new ways to track disease and predict responses, understand how to treat patients, and much more.

For More Info

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

Drugs@FDA at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf>. Drugs@FDA is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

National Eye Institute

Website: <https://www.nei.nih.gov>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Website: <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

American College of Rheumatology

Website: <https://www.rheumatology.org>

American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association, Inc.

Website: <https://www.aarda.org>

Arthritis Foundation

Website: <https://www.arthritis.org>

National Organization for Rare Disorders

Website: <https://www.rarediseases.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov.

- [Asian Language Health Information](#)
- [Spanish Language Health Information](#)