

What is Giant Cell Arteritis?

Those over the age of 50 are more likely to be affected by giant cell arteritis.

1 Introduction

Giant cell arteritis (GCA) is the inflammation of arteries, mostly in the scalp or the head. Inflammation causes blood vessels to swell and narrow. This restricts blood flow, including oxygen and vital nutrients, to reach body tissues. Please use this guide to understand the cause, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of giant cell arteritis.

2 Cause

The cause of the blood vessel inflammation is not known. However, there are some factors that make one susceptible to giant cell arteritis. Risk factors include:

- Age – giant cell arteritis affects adults only, and rarely those under age 50
- Gender – women are more likely to develop the condition than men
- European descent
- Having polymyalgia rheumatic
- Family history of GCA

3 Symptoms

Some common symptoms are related to polymyalgia rheumatic. In fact, nearly 50% of people with giant cell arteritis also have polymyalgia

rheumatic. Symptoms may be severe in pain and may include:

- Fever
- Tongue pain
- Unexplained fatigue
- Scalp tenderness and headache
- Pain in jaw or face
- Appetite and/or weight loss
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Pain in shoulders, arm, neck or hip

When left untreated, it may prolong the symptoms and lead to permanent vision loss, aortic aneurysm, or stroke.

4 Diagnosis

It may be difficult to diagnose giant cell arteritis due to the symptoms resembling other conditions. Consequently, your doctor may try to rule out other conditions. Some tests your doctor may use include physical examination, blood work, or imaging tests. The best way to confirm giant cell arteritis is by doing a biopsy of the temporal artery.

5 Treatment

Treatment may begin immediately after diagnosis in order to prevent vision loss. Initially, high doses of steroids may be administered, but as inflammation of the arteries goes down, the dosage will be reduced as well. In addition to steroids, aspirin may be taken to prevent blood clots.

Did you know?

Women are about 3 times more likely than men to develop giant cell arteritis.

For more information on this and other rheumatic diseases, please visit www.rheumatology.org

References:

https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/giant-cell-arteritis/symptoms-causes/syc-20372758?utm_source=Google&utm_medium=abstract&utm_content=Temporal-arteritis&utm_campaign=Knowledge-panel

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