

Giant Cell Arteritis

This material will help you understand giant cell arteritis and how it is treated.

What is giant cell arteritis?

Giant cell arteritis (GCA, also known as temporal arteritis) is an inflammation of the large arteries. The arteries that carry blood from the heart to the head are most likely to be effected. GCA occurs in people over the age of 50, and becomes more common as you age.

What are the symptoms of giant cell arteritis?

The symptoms of GCA may include:

- New headache that typically does not respond to medicine
- Double vision or blurred vision
- Vision loss that may come and go or be permanent
- Head tenderness, especially at the temples
- Jaw pain when chewing; and
- Stiffness or pain in the neck, hip, or arms

How is giant cell arteritis diagnosed?

Your doctor will take a complete history and perform a complete exam. This is because some of the symptoms of GCA, like headache, occur for many other reasons. If he/she is concerned about GCA,

blood tests are usually ordered. These tests do not prove whether you have GCA, but may help your doctor decide whether a biopsy is necessary to make the diagnosis. A biopsy of an artery in the scalp is usually the test to confirm if you have GCA. This is an outpatient procedure that can be performed in a clinic.

How is giant cell arteritis treated?

Getting treatment right away is very important. Your doctor will likely treat your GCA by prescribing you corticosteroids to reduce the inflammation. If you have developed vision loss, this type of medicine may help stabilize your eyesight, but it will not reverse your vision loss. Many people with GCA feel better as soon as they start corticosteroid treatment. However, corticosteroids may have side effects when taken for months to years. Side effects include an increased risk of infection and bone fracture. Your doctor will monitor you closely while you are having treatment.

For more information, scan this code with your smartphone or visit the website listed.



<http://www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/diseases/giant-cell-arteritis-risk.cfm>

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